

**Narrated Selves and Others:**  
**A Study of Mimetic Desire in Five Contemporary**  
**British and American Novels**

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## Abstract

My doctoral dissertation, “Narrated Selves and Others: A Study of Mimetic Desire in Five Contemporary British and American Novels,” explores the relationships between fictional characters as demonstrated by the self’s desire to imitate the being of another. The novels studied in the dissertation are *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (1961) by Muriel Spark, *Sula* (1973) by Toni Morrison, *The Secret History* (1992) by Donna Tartt, *Amsterdam* (1998) by Ian McEwan, and *What I Loved* (2003) by Siri Hustvedt.

In the thesis, I will deal with René Girard’s mimetic theory and develop it further in the literary realm, both through a close-reading of individual novels and through a partial synthesizing of Girard’s thought with some key concepts of current narrative theory, such as the implied author and narrative perspective structure. The key issue, however, is to determine the timeliness and continuing fecundity of Girard’s thought as a tool in analyzing contemporary English-language fiction, as opposed to the more established ‘classic’ works read by Girard himself. According to Girard’s thought, which combines literary studies with a broader base of cultural studies and philosophical anthropology, imitation, or ‘mimesis,’ is characteristic of all humans, but because of its tendency to become rivalrous, it leads to conflict, both between individuals and in society at large. Girard furthermore thinks that archaic religion was founded on the surrogate victim mechanism the goal of which was to salvage the community from ever-spreading conflict and strife by channelling violence into a scapegoat. However, with the advent of Judaism and Christianity, history became aware of the essential innocence of the victim and destroyed the credibility of the scapegoat mechanism, rendering the current social and cultural context more vulnerable to reciprocal violence, with an apocalyptic choice between renouncing violence and succumbing to it looming at the historical crossroads.

One purpose of this study is to make Girard’s thought as a whole more appealing to the mainstream of literary studies and fortify the appeal of literature as a privileged medium of knowledge with regard to mimetic theory, without undermining its deliberately interdisciplinary focus. Although explicit ‘conversions’ of characters signalling the end of idolatry of other characters are less common than in Girard’s nineteenth-century and older examples, the implied author still recommends the possibility of this conversion in those cases where it fails to take place on the level of story or narration.

## Acknowledgements

When the subject of a study is mimetic desire, namely a desire to imitate what others desire, the author of that study should take care to own up to that desire in herself. Giving credit where credit is due becomes all the more pressing, since the self often takes great pains to hide her imitation, not only from others, but also from herself. By acknowledging those others who helped me conduct my research and write the dissertation at hand I am therefore putting my money where my mouth is. However, on this particular occasion at least, admitting to having been influenced by others is easy, as during the time it took to finish this book I have been the happy recipient of only the good things that ‘interdividual psychology’ entails: guidance, support and inspiration.

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## 1 Introduction: René Girard's Mimetic Theory and Literary Studies

“Great novels always spring from an obsession that has been transcended.” This is how René Girard sums up what for him constitutes the most important project of all literary fiction, indeed, the only project that really counts (Girard 1976, 300). But what is this “obsession” that, according to Girard, makes its appearance in most novels and is “transcended” in the vastly superior ones? Moreover, how can one claim that there is “always” some obsession to be transcended? And perhaps most importantly, how can one, in the context of contemporary ontological relativism, even strive to “transcend” anything?

Not only has Girard not recanted his early remark, but he has also continued to maintain it and elaborate on it for fifty years and counting. In fact, this remark, made in his first book, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel* (originally published in French in 1961 and translated into English in 1965), lays the foundation for the theoretical framework he has steadily added to in his subsequent work. This framework is called *mimetic theory*. Mimetic theory is concerned with the phenomenon, both literary and non-literary, of *mimetic desire*. It is this mimetic desire which, in its negative form of *mimetic rivalry*, is the obsession that needs transcending. And according to early Girard, in this early book at least, there is no medium better suited for transcending mimetic obsession than literary fiction. Even after expanding the scope of mimetic theory to include culture and society at large and in the process turning more and more into an anthropologist than a literary critic, Girard has continued to reference his library of favourite novelistic and dramatic works, even while insisting that literature no longer holds the pride of place in his thought that it once did (Girard 1988, 199-200; Girard 2010 a, 15).

This study hopes to readdress and thus re-strengthen the bond between literature in particular and culture at large in Girard's mimetic theory by bringing it into a more systematic dialogue with literary studies, especially narrative theory. Is Girard's thought a timely and pertinent approach in analysing contemporary English-language fiction, given that his own readings have focused exclusively on canonized texts such as the Bible, ancient Greek tragedy, Renaissance writers such as Cervantes and Shakespeare, and nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century novels (most of these in French)? In the thesis that follows I shall employ Girard's mimetic theory in all its major developments in reading five novelistic examples, all ranging from British or American works written in between 1961 and 2003. The hypothesis is that although these contemporary texts are less likely to eschew mimetic resentment and conflict in their story worlds, they nevertheless recommend such a solution on the level of implied authorship.



Why Girard, and why now? During the theorist's illustrious career (which culminated in his being received into the L'Académie française in 2005), his mimetic theory has hardly gone unnoticed in the human sciences. Nevertheless, literary scholars have not been enthusiastic in applying the whole bulk of his theory to readings of narrative fiction – especially contemporary narrative fiction in English –, whereas books that have as their main objective to re-introduce to new audiences mimetic theory in its entirety have mostly dealt with literature only when recalling Girard's own uses of it, the usual suspects always popping up. These include the five novelists analyzed in *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel* (i.e., Cervantes, Stendhal, Flaubert, Dostoevsky, and Proust), Greek tragedy, Shakespeare, and the Bible.<sup>1</sup>

My thesis is that Girard's mimetic theory can serve as a fecund tool in literary criticism precisely because it embraces other human science disciplines, while still treating literature as an important medium on its own. Whereas those few literary scholars showing any interest in Girard tend to focus on certain aspects of his thinking (usually either triangular character relationships or the scapegoating motif, or in some rarer occasions, the realization of character conversion), I would maintain the merits of viewing Girard's large theoretical arch, his three- (or, according to Hamerton-Kelly, four-) stepped pattern, itself as a legitimate theory of narrative.

A mimetic theory of narrative would look for a three-fold event in a given text: firstly, the problem of mimetic rivalry, secondly, the rise of scapegoating and its possible frustration due to a sacrificial meltdown, and thirdly, the unmasking of mimetic violence resulting in a conversion of sorts, either on the level of story world, narration, or the implied author. Needless to say, the 'mimetic' analysis of a text is never a strictly zero-sum game, and there

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<sup>1</sup> There are notable exceptions to this rule, of course. William A. Johnsen's *Violence and Modernism: Ibsen, Joyce, and Woolf* (2003) and Thomas J. Cousineau's *Ritual Unbound: Reading Sacrifice in Modernist Fiction* (2004) have combined mimetic theory and readings of Modernist classics, whereas Paisley Livingston's *Models of Desire: René Girard and the Psychology of Mimesis* (1992) makes use of an Icelandic saga among other, non-literary examples in demonstrating the various benefits and limitations of Girard's framework. In his book, *The Sacred Game: The Role of the Sacred in the Genesis of Modern Literary Fiction* (1994), the Hispanist Cesáreo Bandera, on the other hand, has extended Girard's readings of Cervantes to other Spanish Golden Age writers, especially Calderón, while simultaneously tracing the sacrificial meltdown as evident in the historical transition from the epic to the novel (and Early Modern drama). Relying on readings of Girard's own favourites by no means implies lack of original input, as Sandor Goodhart has shown in his *Sacrificing Commentary: Reading the End of Literature* (1996) that engages, among other works, Shakespeare and the Hebrew Bible, but includes particular texts of those canons untouched by Girard (*Richard II*, *The Book of Jonah*). For her part, Mary Orr has taken up Girard's mimetic theory, especially his analysis of scapegoating, and employed it in the study of intertextuality (with texts standing in for characters).

Yet another case is evident in those theorists who have been inspired by mimetic theory, but have taken it to a plane where it is almost unrecognizable in its original form. A perfect example is Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (1985), a pioneering work in Queer studies that takes from mimetic theory its triangular structure of desire, but eschews everything else, most importantly perhaps Girard's emphasis on the need to transcend rivalry by recognizing it in the self and in the other.

are many degrees in which the conversion can take place, even on the implied authorial level, which is not necessarily an omnipotent sphere of enlightenment, even though it is capable of an idealism often escaping the narratorial and characteral levels. This plan to develop Girard's mimetic theory narratologically further in order to render it more meaningful to literary studies is delineated in the second chapter of the dissertation.

Let us therefore delve into the great arch of mimetic theory and elaborate on its literary and non-literary merits alike.

After *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, Girard expanded the scope of mimetic theory to culture as a whole, an expansion that was already nascent in his 'literary' debut, since the purely poetic domain was never Girard's first priority; the novels he analyzed in *Deceit* were regarded as windows to history, society, culture and the psyche. Nonetheless Girard's early Structuralist influences – he was after all a French-born humanities scholar starting his career in the 1950's and was himself instrumental in introducing 'French Theory' to the American academia in the 1960's – caused him to study structures, but in a considerably more anti-dualist way that structuralist fascination with binary opposites would suggest. Neither is Girard a stranger to poststructuralism, his main quarrel with it being its tendency to disregard the actual reality of the anthropological laws underlying literary texts in favour of the Text. Girard is, however, appreciative of early Derrida with whom he shares an aversion to binary opposites (cf. e.g., McKenna 1992, 14).<sup>2</sup>

Girard's theoretical 'system' has three or four stages, depending on whether one regards Girard's *Battling to the End* (originally published in French in 2007 and translated into English in 2010) as building into a separate stage. Robert Hamerton-Kelly, who is in favour of the four-part model, has named these stages as (1.) the Literary, (2.) the Anthropological, (3.) the Theological, and (4.) the Historical stage (Hamerton-Kelly 2013).<sup>3</sup> Let us study these stages as part of the continuum they are meant to exist in.

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<sup>2</sup> In his early writings Girard championed the boldly holistic ventures of the structuralists who challenged the hermetically sealed aestheticism of New Criticism. He would nevertheless later distance himself from the family tree of structuralism, as well as reject its poststructuralist fruits. For Girard's early enthusiasm for the new French thought, see "Formalism and Structuralism in Literature and the Human Sciences" (2008, orig. 1963) and "Critical Reflections on Literary Studies" (2008, orig. 1966), whereas his eventual disillusionment is most clearly articulated in "Theory and Its Terrors" (2008, orig. 1989) the title of which speaks volumes of its own (cf. also Doran 2008, xxiii). Girard appreciates the broadly anthropological context addressed by, for example, Lévi-Strauss, but laments his typically structuralist emphasis on difference as opposed to identity (Girard 2001 a, 158).

<sup>3</sup> Hamerton-Kelly's names for the last two phases in Girard's 'system' are somewhat ambiguous, since "Theological" here means the *secularization* of religion as it is traditionally understood, namely as a realm of the sacred, whereas "Historical" is not meant to denote any specific chronological or epochal shift but is rather employed in the sense of the *apocalyptic*: a socio-cultural crisis or meltdown on a global scale and with an

The first stage of mimetic theory is called “Literary” with good reason, since Girard first formulated his concept of mimetic desire in *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, a book-length study of the five ‘great’ novelists who succeed not only in describing this desire but also in transcending its ‘Romantic lie’ and achieving what Girard calls the ‘novelistic truth.’ According to Girard, the desire experienced by novelistic characters – as well as ‘real people’ – does not only include the subject and the object, but the subject desires objects already desired by another. This Other<sup>4</sup> is regarded as a mediator, or model, of desire, and eventually a rival for the object or objects in question. (Girard 1976, 1-2). Desire is therefore initially triangular in structure in that it revolves around three points, as it were: the desiring subject, the object of desire, and the model that inspired the desire in the object in the first place. However, once the rivalry between the imitator and his or her model intensifies, the object becomes of secondary value in comparison with the act of its pursuit, and the rival’s self is turned into the sole focus of attention. The desire to *have* is replaced by the desire to *be* (Girard 1976, 74; 83). The imitator wants to become like his or her model and still retain an essential part of his or her original self (Girard 1976, 54). What began as a triangular dynamic has turned into a dyadic one, but not in the Cartesian mode of subject / object, but in the doubly subjective mode of imitator / model.

Girard calls the model a *mediator*, because he or she mediates desire to the imitating subject. When this mediation is *external*, the process of transferring desire is relatively uncomplicated since the model’s status as a model is openly recognized. External mediation prevailed in the old class society where life was hierarchical and unfairly rigid to be sure, but outright conflict at least was avoided. However, the social equality in our current Western society has produced conflict in that everyone not only wishes to be equal, but in the spirit of Romantic and post-Nietzschean individualism, superiorly autonomous, as well. This desire to be peerless among peers has resulted in the *internalization* of mimetic mediation and the subject’s unwillingness to reveal or recognize his or her imitative desire. He or she has been driven to what Dostoevsky poignantly called the Underground, a realm of existence where the self is constantly and clandestinely measured against the divinized and demonized Other.

For Girard, there exists only one way out of this existential and spiritual cul-de-sac, and that is to recognize that the Underground mentality is a universal phenomenon afflicting the

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escalating rapidity. What mimetic theory means to denote with terms like ‘apocalypse’ and ‘the sacred’ will be clarified in the course of the study at hand.

4 In his first book on mimetic theory, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, Girard uses the capital letter ‘O’ when discussing the otherness of the model, or “mediator,” of desire, whereas in subsequent writings the capital letter is dropped.

whole of humanity. One must therefore revoke the Underground Man's desperate self-malediction "I am alone and they are together." The recognition of the universality of mimetic desire is not tantamount to giving up mimesis, but merely to understanding its hidden machinations and all too common dangers and double binds. This recognition is what Girard calls the 'novelistic truth' that delivers the subject from the solipsistic and delusional individualism of the 'Romantic lie.'

The second stage of mimetic theory was conceived by Girard in a deliberate move away from the specifically literary realm of *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*. The result of this anthropological step was his conceiving of the surrogate victim mechanism in *Violence and the Sacred* (published in French in 1972, translated into English in 1977). In this book, Girard developed his theory of the relationship between human violence and the birth of religion from the need to curtail that violence. The sacrifice by the community of the surrogate victim, or the 'scapegoat,' is the ritual re-enactment of the scene of original murder, itself a fortuitous channelling of collective strife, born out of the escalation of mimetic rivalry, into one individual or group. Girard thus advances a Durkheimian hypothesis of religion as social cohesion, as opposed to a more Frazerian conception of agriculturally motivated fertility cults. Furthermore, there is nothing theological or contemplative about archaic religion, but rather it is the pragmatic foundation of all aspects of culture, from kingship to justice systems, from marriage laws to hunting practices, etc.

However, in order for the religiously sanctioned, sacrificially channelled violence to work its cathartic magic on the community, the belief in the surrogate victim's guilt must be maintained. According to Girard, mythology is the narrative justification of the ritual sacrifice, and myths must always insist that the original victim, who is worshipped as a god because he or she saved the community from its own violence, received a fair punishment for a very real transgression.

The question of the victim's guilt or innocence is what bridges Girard's second, "Anthropological," stage to his third, "Theological," stage, signalled by the publication of *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World* in 1978 (English translation in 1987). In it Girard puts forward his most controversial hypothesis, namely the singularity of Judaism and Christianity in recognizing what archaic religion had repressed: the innocence of the surrogate victim and his or her fundamental similarity with the community of sacrificers. Whereas the archaic myth repeats the expedient lie about the victim getting what is coming to him or her, the gospel reveals this lie for what is. Whereas in archaic religion, the founding victims were simultaneously revered as gods and cursed as demons, Christianity has God incarnate as a

victim whose innocence is loudly proclaimed, thus sully forever the fecundity of sacrificial mythology and ritual practice.

Of course, in historical actuality, the Christian church institutions have not lived up to the essentially non-violent message that Girard claims to find in the Scriptural essence of the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament. On the contrary, historical Christianity has often continued the archaic status quo of the 'tribal' religion it has replaced, and there are also numerous archaic remnants in the Biblical texts themselves. But institutional Christianity has been unable to ignore the innocence of the victim and apply the brakes on sacrificial meltdown. It is this meltdown that has caused old hierarchies to collapse and has enabled not only equality but also rivalry to thrive. Ironically, the Gospel message has inadvertently increased reciprocal violence between all, while it has decreased sacrificial violence of all against one.

The fourth, "Historical," stage of mimetic theory brings us back to the beginning, to the Tocquevillean democracy that runs rampant in the nineteenth- and twentieth-century novels Girard reads in *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*. But Girard has recently elaborated on his preoccupations with history – a field he started his academic career in before making his reputation in literary studies and philosophical anthropology – in *Battling to the End*, a reading of Clausewitz's *On War* that updates the Prussian strategist's preoccupations with the Napoleonic apocalypse from the perspective of current Wars on Terror. The abolition of the sacrificial scapegoating process has left humanity deprived of a device by which to manage violence and facing the radical choice of either repudiating violence or being engulfed by it.

The 'novelistic conclusion' of the early Girard is thus supplemented with his growing appreciation of a specifically Christian conversion, as only Christianity is for him able to transcend mimetic rivalry through *imitatio Christi* (though not in the ascetic sense meant by Thomas à Kempis; on the contrary, according to Girard's view, Christ invites Christians to follow his very desire to be like God; Girard 2001, 13). This is not to say that one needs to be a devout Christian believer in order to appreciate the Christian anthropology of the innocent victim. Mimetic theory is Christian 'only' to the point of viewing Christianity (and Judaism as its vital precursor) as radically different from other religions – or *the* religion, since for Girard, religion in the sense of its archaic origins, is synonymous with the blind foundation of all culture and is not to be understood as so many doctrinal denominations. In this sense, Christianity is a kind of anti-religion, also with regard to its own sacrificial traditions as adopted by the historical church institutions (cf. Gans 2013, 92).

The contrast between the ‘Romantic lie’ and the ‘novelistic truth’ has, in the later Girard, given way to a similar one between myth (i.e., the archaic adherence to sacrificial violence) and gospel (i.e., the Judeo-Christian revelation of the sacrificial victim’s innocence). The only difference is that the ‘Romantic lie,’ unlike archaic myth, is a post-sacrificial syndrome in that the fallacy of discrete individualism can only be entertained in a world that has lost its archaic conformity. The ‘novelistic truth’ as a cure to the ‘Romantic lie’ is therefore doubly entrenched in Judeo-Christian anthropology: firstly, it exerts its influence in a world whose Romantic individualisms are made possible by the meltdown of the scapegoat mechanism which itself consisted in the Judeo-Christian unmasking of the innocent victim; secondly, this same concern for victims now dilutes the individualist extremism that would want to trample on the mass of ‘inferior’ others.

The privileged status of literature in mimetic theory is at least what Girard heralds in his first book. Although starting his academic career as a historian and paleographer and making his reputation as a literary scholar, Girard has defined himself as first and foremost an anthropologist (and not, as his Christian predilection might suggest, a theologian; Williams 2001, ix; Girard 2001, 192) and concerns himself with the overall development of the human sciences. From this broad definition, as well as his speculative methods and admitted lack of fieldwork, it is obvious that he is adhering to a discipline known as ‘philosophical anthropology.’ However, Girard is averse to being called a philosopher, and in *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World* he even claims “that philosophy has used up its resources” and entered into a “crisis” (Girard 1987, 438). This is partly because contemporary postmodernism and poststructuralism, with their “nihilism with regard to knowledge” (Girard 1987, 441), shy away from concrete findings in the ‘real’ world (Girard 1987, 441-442).

Chris Fleming suggests that Girard does not seek to construct a self-sufficient theory of culture, but rather expects culture to provide the data on which to found any theories that might be forthcoming:

The abstract movement of his thought [...] cannot be appreciated in the absence of the extremely dense evidence he enlists to bear out his claims; Girard does not present, in other words, a theoretical framework that somehow stands by itself. (Fleming 2004, 3)

With regard to Girard’s theoretical project when studying literature in particular, Fleming further maintains that Girard seeks to invert the traditional roles of literary creation and literary criticism and use the former to interpret the latter and not the other way around

(Fleming 2004, 9). Rather than studying “the epistemology of literature,” Fleming asserts, Girard is treating “literature as epistemology” (Fleming 2004, 12). The same conclusion about Girard preferring literature over literary theory is drawn by Robert Doran when he states that “[...] what Girard offers us is not a theory of literature or a theory that makes use of literature for some other end, but literature *as* theory” (Doran 2008, xiv; italics in the original); these interpretations of literary epistemology as something more concrete than mainstream philosophy are echoed by Paisley Livingston (1992, 175). According to Eric Gans, the novel for Girard does not simply *affirm* morality but *enacts* it (Gans 2012, 21-22).

Girard’s ‘realism’ is not strict empiricism, however, since he is not involved in statistics or measurements. In fact, Girard pledges allegiance to Darwin whose evolutionary hypothesis cannot “be dismissed by the standard procedure of falsification” (Girard 2007, 164, cf. also Girard 1987, 437-438), but which nevertheless is able to impress with its explanatory power.

Notwithstanding Eric Gans’s analysis of Girard’s thought that claims it to be “essentially metaphorical” (Gans 2012, 70), Girard is nevertheless committed to a level of scientific exactness (relatively speaking) that sets him apart from his poststructuralist contemporaries. As Bruce Hamill concurs, Girard criticizes the poststructuralist side of draining the human sciences of their “scientific spirit” (Hamill 2012, 154; cf. Girard 1987, 438). Girard further laments that postmodernism has reverted to a new kind of puritanism in its fanatical fervour to repulse, not sexual, but epistemological desire: “Present-day thought is the worst form of castration, since it is the castration of the signified. People are always on the look-out to catch their neighbours red-handed in believing something or other” (Girard 1987, 442). It should be added in this context that “believing” is not necessarily synonymous with Christian or any other faith, but with any epistemological conviction whatsoever, including an expressed *lack* of belief. Girard is something of a believer, not because he talks of transcendence as such – he does not –, but because he finds in Christianity the absolute truth of the innocent victim; he is also an unbeliever, since he has the audacity to hypothesize that Christianity is in this case different from other systems of belief (or rather, other anthropologies).

As far as this unearthing of violent origins is concerned, Girard fears that philosophy is part of the problem – and not a solution. This is because, by definition, philosophy beginning from Platonism and ending with Postmodernism, is tantamount to a kind of economics of violence. The aversion of philosophy to denounce and unmask mimetic desire and sacrificial violence and remain dependent on their structure is for Girard evident in Derrida’s treatment of the concept of *pharmakon*; while famously stating that writing is for the phonocentric Socratic and Platonic philosophy both a poison and a remedy, Derrida obscures the ‘real’

issue behind the *pharmakon*, namely the *pharmakos*, the human victim whose scapegoating is for society, like writing is for speech, *a poison and a remedy*. As Andrew McKenna puts it: “[...] philosophy is accomplice to [sacrificial mechanisms] when it thematizes the *pharmakon* while remaining silent about the *pharmakos*” (McKenna 1992, 37). In his essay, “René Girard: The Anthropology of the Cross as Alternative to Post-Modern Literary Criticism,” Paul J. Nuechterlein states the complicity of deconstructionist philosophy even more bluntly, when he writes that “Girard is concerned with dead human bodies, while Derrida seems concerned more with dead letters” (Nuechterlein 2013). From this ‘realist’ preoccupation have stemmed the oft-repeated accusations of Girard’s epistemological and ontological naivism. Girard happily admits that he has a tendency to be reductive in his treatment of texts, since his methodical reduction is suited to capture the narrated reduction evident in the works analyzed, the psychological “straitjacket” the characters find themselves in, for example in Dostoevsky’s *Notes from the Underground* (1864):

The word [straitjacket] is a good one to express not what I myself am doing to the underground man but what he is doing himself. He is in a straitjacket, to be sure, but not one of my making. He got into it himself and he made it himself, or rather Dostoevsky made it for him. In this story, Dostoevsky is not yearning for some ineffable and inexhaustible *je ne sais quoi*. He seeks to convey a much starker reality, a psychological life so impoverished that it generates an incredible amount of repetitive and mechanical behavior. (Girard 1997, 154)

Throughout his career, Girard has had to encounter accusations of the kind of “straightjacket” reductionism that he alludes to in his book about Dostoevsky. It seems that, for example, Toril Moi’s venomous criticism of what she perceives to be Girard’s male chauvinism is at times more concerned with the reductiveness *per se* of mimetic theory than it is with that theory’s content (cf. Moi 2013, 29). Moi is not alone in reproaching Girard for his views (or lack thereof) on gender. Similar accusations have been put forward at least by Sarah Kofman and Mary Jacobus.<sup>5</sup> William A. Johnsen has poignantly countered Moi, Kofman and Jacobus by stating that “[t]he reading of Girard in these essays is sacrificial: Girard is personally blamed for excluding women, instead of being credited for analyzing a system which excludes women” (Johnsen 2003, 144). I most certainly agree with Johnsen’s view that not only does Girard comprehend the sacrificial dynamics of patriarchy but that he also “denies patriarchal as well as matriarchal ‘essentialism’” (ibid.). Girard takes the ontological equality between the sexes for granted, which, as feminism is quite right to point out, is not something that the

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. Works Cited.



patriarchal system does. Far from undermining feminism, mimetic theory could be considered one of its greatest allies, if only feminism is understood in the essentially egalitarian vein, with similarities, not differences, foregrounded. The fact that his own literary and mythological examples are predominantly concerned with male rivalry is only responding to the prevalence of male rivalry that has been produced by patriarchal history.<sup>6</sup>

However, to read more recent works (as I have done in this thesis), both by male and female authors, is to come into more than a brief contact with rivalry between women, and also between women and men. Equality, itself a result of Judeo-Christian thought triumphing over archaic (and *nominally* Christian) hierarchies, is now allowing mimetic desire to spread where it has not always been prevalent. As this study partly aims to prove, contemporary literature is rife with both female, and perhaps more importantly, gender-neutral, rivalry between characters, coupled with the possibility of redemption. Perhaps the most life-affirming quality of Girard's mimetic pattern is its opposition to violence in all possible forms, whether born out of the oppressive hierarchies of the status quo or any 'militant' rebellion against 'the establishment,' and the identification with victims of all kinds, not just certain designated groups or their individual representatives.

This advocacy of non-violence (rather than 'peace,' which is the opposite of chaos, but not always the opposite of violence) is actually what forms the great arch of Girard's *narrative* system, one that can be analyzed through *narratological* means, as this study hopes to show. Although Girard calls his mode of thinking a "theory," one could just as well talk of a narrative pattern of literary (as well as more broadly cultural) analysis.

This thesis has as its goal to study an English language corpus of novels written in the latter part of the twentieth century and the early years of the twenty-first century from the perspective of Girard's mimetic theory. The five novels chosen for this purpose are *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (1961) by Muriel Spark, *Sula* (1973) by Toni Morrison, *The Secret History* (1992) by Donna Tartt, *Amsterdam* (1998) by Ian McEwan, and *What I Loved* (2003) by Siri Hustvedt. These particular works came to be selected because of the historical continuum they represent, from Spark's and Morrison's depictions of microcosmic everyday relationships against the macrocosmic pre-and post-World War II backdrop in the British Isles

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<sup>6</sup> Still, there are instances where Girard allows himself to high-light gender differences *a posteriori*, for example in Shakespeare for whom "[w]oman is the preferred vehicle of truth [...]" (Girard 2004, 324), as well as in the Gospel stories about Christ's female followers witnessing his resurrection. In these both cases women serve as auguries of the Judeo-Christian truth of non-violence, not because of their essential femininity, but because they have a structural view from the margins of a patriarchal society that has excluded them from the realm of violence, be it in the form of either maintaining the sacrificial status quo or pursuing prestige through conflict (cf. Girard 1996 a, 275-277).

and USA respectively, through the postmodern crisis overshadowing Tarrt's 1980's *Zeitgeist*, and culminating in the millennial meltdown of collective and interpersonal institutions of any kind in McEwan and Hustvedt.

Spark's novel, published in the early 1960's – and as such stretching somewhat the "contemporary" delineation of the thesis title – exemplifies the immediacy of a post-World War II need to address the root causes of mimetic conflict, both on the macrolevel of international politics (the rise of Fascism that led to the Holocaust in Europe), as well as on the microlevel of individual interactions (school room rivalries). *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* is also interesting from a Girardian point of view in that it dissects the anatomy of a teacher-student relationship, complete with an ironic travesty of *imitatio Christi*.

Toni Morrison's *Sula*, published approximately a decade after Spark's novel, show-cases a similar intermingling of the individual and collective dimensions of mimetic rivalry and the psycho-cultural need for its containment – a need that is scrutinized and ultimately unmasked by Morrison's implied author. The historical backdrop this time is the slow erosion of racism in a small rural community, witnessed from the perspective of its African-American populace and with a special, though not exclusive, emphasis on female experience. The individual counterpart of the novel's collective anthropology is a friendship, at first sacrificial, then conflictual, between two girls, and the eventual redemption of that friendship through a mutual recognition of mimetic laws. Like *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, *Sula* traces the progression of the protagonists from childhood to adulthood, uncovering what Girard would consider particularly Shakespearean roots of mimetic desire. This temporal continuum in *Sula* arguably marks the novel especially fruitful for a 'mimetic' reading as compared to Morrison's more famous works which also deal with her favourite theme of scapegoating.

*The Secret History* may at first glance seem a relatively lightweight work in comparison. However, its media-hyped bestseller status notwithstanding, Tarrt's novel has proved its longevity as a contemporary American classic, transcending its generic campus thriller qualifications with a shrewd and laborious unmasking of violence at the heart of academic elitism. Employing Euripides's *The Bacchae* – a tragedy found especially revealing of mimetic conflict and sacrificial mechanics by Girard in *Violence and the Sacred* – *The Secret History* draws insightful comparisons between archaic and modern sources of violence as it poignantly addresses the contemporary intellectual's Romantic longing for the containment of cathartic bloodshed.

*Amsterdam*, published in the 1990's as was Tarrt's novel but already anticipating the millennial ethos of that decade's end, is possibly without parallel in contemporary English

fiction when it comes to updating the mutually destructive logic of rivalry most famously recounted in the Greek myth of Eteocles and Polyneices. Blamed for its unremitting bleakness of vision and its satirical extremity, McEwan's novel captures the apocalyptic ramifications of sacrificial meltdown like few works can.

*What I Loved* is also very much a novel of 'our times.' Published after '9/11' but covering a period of time immediately preceding it, Hustvedt's novel juxtaposes pathologies in family structure and the largely dormant envy between two friends with the backdrop of an artworld whose nihilistic culture politics gives birth to murder posing as a singularly creative instance of individual talent. *What I Loved* is especially pertinent in its description of how mimetic desire is divorced from the concrete reality of material objects and loving human relationships, and is thus highly metaphysical in nature. Hustvedt's novel furthermore shares with the previously mentioned works a preoccupation with the theme of transgressive desire and the Nietzschean 'Superman' motif.

In the thesis at hand, the theme of mimetic desire as it is unearthed in the five novels studied will be treated from different viewpoints in each of the following six chapters.

Chapter two sets the theoretical stage of the thesis. The first subchapter elaborates Girard's mimetic theory through a reading of a novelistic example, Toni Morrison's *Sula* (1973). The second subchapter will then analyze the relationship between mimetic theory and the field of contemporary literary studies, exploring the possibilities of bringing Girard's thought into fruitful dialogue with narrative theory, or narratology.

Chapter three moves on to readings of the other novels as well, focusing on the theme of moral transgression and the role mimetic desire plays in motifs like Nietzschean Superman fantasy, criminal complicity, personal betrayal and 'brotherly' – or 'sisterly' – feud.

Chapter four analyzes the social dynamics of character groups and fictional communities of the novels, approaching this collective dimension via Girard's concepts of the surrogate victim mechanism and its subsequent meltdown in the wake of a spreading sacrificial crisis.

Chapter five focuses on the religious or pseudo-religious dimensions of character dynamics from the viewpoint of Girard's reinterpretations of such diametrically opposed Christian (and partly Jewish) concepts as *imitatio Christi* and Satan, and how these concepts are related to mimetic desire as they manifest themselves in the interactions between characters in the novels. *Imitatio Christi*, when explicit (such as in Spark's *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* or Tarrt's *The Secret History*) is usually heavily ironized, evoking the travesty thereof and showcasing characters who exhibit decidedly 'Satanic' features. However, through this very contrast, the implied authors of these texts also propagate, no matter how

covertly, the ideal of beneficial imitation as the very opposite of the kind of *imitatio Satanae* that sadly runs rampant in the story world.

Chapter six explores mimetic relationships from the point of view of the main focalizing character (in some cases, such as in Tarrt's and Hustvedt's novels, also the first-person narrator) and how he or she comes to regard that relationship in the course of time and take stock of its ramifications through the workings of memory. Chapter six thus paves way to chapter seven that deals with the possibility of redeeming mimetic relationships through a kind of conversion experience which entails the repudiation of negative, 'Satanic' mimesis and replacing it with a transfigured version that both sees through mimetic desire and recognizes its inevitability and universality.

Chapter seven tests Girard's thesis about the 'novelistic truth' and whether this ideal solution is still viable in contemporary fiction. A case will be made for defending the Girardian conclusion by extending the motif of conversion from the levels of story and narration to the level of the implied author.

The reason why conversion has become so rare in the plots of contemporary novels could be that the Christianity inherent in the moral structure informing secular Western texts is recognized both as a politically incorrect embarrassment since it does not respect the pluralist dogma of all truths being true at the same time, while the Christian (and Jewish) singularity of siding with the victims is instinctually and even unconsciously admired. This double-edged sword quality of Judeo-Christianity in the contemporary world does not diminish Girard's emphasis on the importance of conversion, but rather reflects its continuing vitality, even if this vitality has become somewhat clandestine under pressure.

## 2 Girard and the Literature of Dyadic Relations

This thesis is concerned with questions of identity and narrative. However, to group it under research conducted on narrative identity per se would be misleading. The focus here is on dyadic, i.e., one-to-one, human relationships as fictionalized in novelistic character dynamics. These character interactions, both in the forms of clashes and rapprochements, are indeed about intertwining identities and their narrated quality in the textual wholes of the literary work. The focus is *not*, therefore, on the partly literary-philosophical realm of how a narrative identity – or its relationship to another narrative identity – is represented through purely linguistic or semiotic means, but how a very anthropomorphous interrelationship – what Girard calls *interdividual psychology* both inside and outside literature – is conveyed through the medium of literary fiction which is itself a privileged form of knowledge, a kind of literary anthropology. What is quite consciously risked in this focus is the loss of the primacy of language in literary narrative, even though language is not altogether ignored. Of course, text is always constructed of language and any literary analysis neglects the linguistic dimension at its peril. Nevertheless, to maintain that literary studies must by definition foreground language is taking the issue to the other extreme.<sup>7</sup>

For Girard, the idea of mediated desire “encourages literary comparisons at a level which is no longer that of *genre* criticism or thematic criticism. It may illuminate the works through each other; it may unite them without destroying their irreducible singularity” (Girard 1976, 23; italics in the original).

Unfortunately, Girard’s spurning of many staples of contemporary cultural theory has created a serious barrier for his own mimetic hypothesis being embraced by the literary studies community – a community that cannot afford to remain aloof in the face of the very *textuality* of texts and therefore feels more at home with the more linguistically oriented thinkers like Lacan and Derrida. Unlike these poststructuralists, Girard maintains the primacy of mimesis to language (e.g., Girard 1987, 294). Neither is Girard interested in the purely representational aspect of mimesis in the spirit of Plato or Auerbach<sup>8</sup>; on the contrary, he accuses the Platonic tradition of a lingering archaic superstition inherent in its reluctance to acknowledge the all-encompassing socio-cultural character of imitation, especially when it

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<sup>7</sup> As Marie-Laure Ryan writes: “When an author creates a story, she designs events whose meaning for the plot as a whole go far beyond their linguistic meaning” (Ryan 2013).

<sup>8</sup> As Wolfgang Iser elegantly sums up Girard’s particular brand of mimesis: “Unlike Plato and more or less the whole philosophical tradition that follows, Girard does not limit imitation to representational forms like behavior, manner or forms of speaking but emphasizes the role of imitation in connection with acquisitive desire” (Iser 2012/2002).

comes to imitating the desires (and not just external behaviour) of others (Girard 1987, 8; 15-18). Even though Girard speaks of modern thought as especially hostile to the idea of influence and interdependence, the philosophical fear of mimesis can be traced as far back as to Plato and Aristotle. Plato's examples of mimesis are limited to representation, to manners, habit, phrases etc., and in Girard's opinion he ignores the question of how imitative behaviour is linked to appropriation. Girard laments that "[i]t was Plato who determined once and for all the cultural meaning of imitation, but this meaning is truncated, torn from the essential dimension of acquisitive behaviour, which is also the dimension of conflict" (Girard 1987, 8). For Girard, on the contrary, imitation is much more fundamental and universal an issue, because mimetic desire more than anything else separates us from animals and makes us human.

Girard is also critical of his French contemporaries who, in his opinion, view cultural phenomena through the surface level of mere expression: "The shimmer and play of mimesis are in themselves uninteresting. The only interesting task is to integrate all of this into a rational framework and transform it into real knowledge" (Girard 1987, 17-18).

Girard's plea for epistemological realism sounds as far removed from the relativist tendencies of contemporary humanities today as it did in the late 1970's. Nor is his academic alienation any less felt in connection with the Anglo-American learned society. If the branch of literary studies that has been mostly informed by continental philosophy, such as phenomenology and psychoanalysis, tends to relegate Girard's mimetic theory in the margins, then the more positivist and 'analytical' school of narratology has almost completely ignored him. But if Girard can be integrated into the field of contemporary literary studies, then the latter 'school' would be a more suitable accommodation for him than the former. This is because mimetic theory does not directly clash with narratological methodology in any ideological sense; even the narratological debt to French structuralism detested by Girard is not as big a barrier as it would at first seem, at least, if narratology is treated as a *methodology* and not as a *philosophy*. This is what I plan to do in this study; to use narratology, when needed, as a translational tool in demonstrating the value Girardian theory has to offer to the systematic study of narrative texts.

Although Girard is not concerned with the 'literariness' of literature and even finds no possibilities of new anthropological insights in post-Proustian fiction (Girard 2010 a, 15; Girard 2012 a), he nevertheless deems the novel a privileged medium of knowledge, even if only exemplified by "certain exceptional works as agents of a very special demystification which bears on the hidden role of mimetic effects in human interaction" (Girard 1988, 199-

200). It is left therefore for us scholars more invested in demonstrating the continuity of mimetic insights in the novel to bring mimetic theory into a dialogue with more contemporary works of literary fiction. Needless to say, Girard's groundwork in the detection of "Romantic lies" and "novelistic truths" remains valuable for this ongoing endeavour.

For Girard, the liberation from the 'Romantic lie' ('mensonge romantique') entails the 'novelistic truth' ('vérité romanesque') inherent in the greatest of novels, such as those by Cervantes, Dostoyevski and Proust, because these writers "were systematically interested in human relations" (Girard 2007, 174). The novelistic truth enables the imitator to see the fact of his own imitation and recognize a similar imitative tendency in his model with whom he shares a common humanity. It entails "a better knowledge of Others" (Girard 1976, 298), and also of the self.

That Girard is always concerned with real human relations, is for his anthropological project a given, but in the structural context of narratology this 'realism' needs to be emphasized, even at the risk of provoking the wrath of those critics who regard this kind of anthropomorphism to be the most naïve primitivism. However, one can detect a similar tendency of thinking beyond the text-as-artifact in contemporary narratology itself. For example, Ansgar Nünning points out:

Even at the risk of incurring the displeasure of those who will immediately be suspicious of mimetic and referential fallacies, I would like to maintain that there is no reason why narratology should not avail itself of empirical personality theories in the study of character. [...]. Literary characters can [...] be said to be endowed with perspectives comparable to those of real human beings [...]. (Nünning 2001, 210)

Although characters are not "real human beings," they are nevertheless agents in a fictional thought experiment, one that deliberately emulates actual reality. As Paul Ricoeur eloquently sums up, "Literature is a vast laboratory in which we experiment with estimations, evaluations, and judgements of approval and condemnation through which narrativity serves as a propaedeutic to ethics" (Ricoeur 1992, 115).

*Deceit, Desire, and the Novel* is a reading of literary classics, spanning from Cervantes in the early seventeenth century to Proust in the early twentieth, and in between these two historical poles, it dwells on the golden age of the novel, namely the nineteenth century (Stendhal, Flaubert and Dostoevsky). But what about prose works that came – and keep coming – after? Do the novels published between World War II and 9/11 (and even later) deal with a similarly 'mimetic' "obsession"? And if so, does this obsession lend itself to be

“transcended?” In other words, do the novels analyzed in the study at hand meet the criteria for what Girard deems “great” literature?

If for Girard, the novelistic *conclusion* is tantamount to a *conversion*, then how is this outcome defined? Does it have to take place in the story of a given narrative text, or is it sufficient if the ‘novelistic truth’ is implicitly preferred by the text, even though it is not realized in the plot?

In the readings of contemporary English language novels that make up this study, the case will be made for a ‘novelistic’ conclusion in which such a Girardian conversion is achieved less explicitly and is perhaps only hinted at by the implied author or a similar kind of textual agent. In order to achieve this, it should first be explored whether the basic concepts of narratology – the implied author, as well as the story/discourse relationship – make for valuable tools in translating Girard’s multi-disciplinary mimetic theory, with its obvious privileging of ‘literary’ epistemology, into the language of mainstream literary studies.

Chapter 2.1. will produce a ‘mimetic’ reading of an example text, Toni Morrison’s 1973 novel, *Sula*. *Sula* is a novel that realizes Girard’s ‘novelistic truth,’ namely the main character’s conversion away from destructive mimesis, on all levels of the text: the story, the narration, and the implied author.

Chapter 2.2. will then pave the theoretical, i.e., narratological, way to the following readings of novels which are not as openly ‘conversional’ as *Sula* is and which, I argue, need the implied author to recommend a ‘novelistic’ conclusion to the implied reader despite the fact that such a conclusion is lacking (or at least undetermined) on the levels of story and narration.

## 2.1 A ‘Mimetic’ Reading of Toni Morrison’s *Sula*

Scapegoating is a frequent theme in several Toni Morrison’s novels (cf. e.g., Goulimari 2012), but a consistently ‘Girardian’ reading of *Sula* (1973) goes a long way to demonstrate not only the imminent fact of the surrogate victimage motif, but also its dimensions of person-to-person rivalry and the collective escalation of uncontrollable violence, as well as the conversion through which both scapegoating and rivalry are transcended and repudiated.<sup>9</sup> At

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<sup>9</sup> In her article “Something Else to Be: Singularities and Scapegoating Logics in Toni Morrison’s Early Novels” (*Angelaki Journal of the Theoretical Humanities*, vol. II, number 2, August 2006, pp. 191-204), Pelagia Goulimari employs, somewhat critically, Girard’s theory of sacrifice to Morrison’s works. However, she does



the heart of the novel's narrative dynamic is the one-on-one interaction between former childhood friends Sula Peace and Nel Wright (later Greene through marriage), and it is this relationship, a friendship revealed as rivalry, that is both analogous with and contrasted to the collective storyline of sacrifice and eventual sacrificial crisis. In the end of the novel Nel gains insight into the hidden machinations of the scapegoating mechanism working against Sula and realizes the arbitrary character of her friend's ostracisement by the black community of the town of Medallion (cf. Goulmari 2012, 200). Moreover, Nel learns to see her own sacrificial guilt in connection to her and Sula's accidental killing of a small boy, Chicken Little, when they were twelve-year-olds. This secret partnership in crime has a scapegoating undercurrent of its own and it cements the bond between the two friends until their falling-out in adulthood over Sula's affair with Nel's husband Jude. Though still not actively taking part in the symbolic and verbal scapegoating of Sula by her neighbourhood, Nel comes to share their beliefs in Sula's evil nature and derive vicarious pleasure from her victimizing. In the end of the novel, when Sula has been dead for twenty-five years, Nel's meeting with Sula's estranged grandmother Eva Peace forces her to confront her hypocrisy concerning her cherished martyrdom and having made Sula alone shoulder the guilt over Chicken Little's drowning.

Contrasted to Nel's eventual conversion consisting in the recognition of her own scapegoating tendencies is the collective annihilation facing many of the residents of Medallion's black community (or "the Bottom," as it is colloquially called) after they storm the white-owned construction site that promised but failed to deliver employment for black men. The carnivalistic frenzy with which the Bottomers attack the tunnel that is being dug on the site spells the end of the communally contained (and in this case, symbolic and non-physical) violence to which Sula had been subjected while she lived. Thus, after the loss of their scapegoat, the Bottom turns against its real social and historical antagonist, namely the white capitalist establishment. But although Morrison's critique of the oppressive and racist status quo of early 1940's Ohio (not to mention the rest of the USA) is scathing and poignant, she does not romanticize the violent revolt of the oppressed. On the contrary, the text follows the logic of cathartic violence to its inevitable conclusion, where the archaic hypocrisy of the single victim mechanism has given way to the more honest but all-consuming reciprocity of answering a blow with another blow. The assault on the tunnel leads precisely to the

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not explicitly explore the aspect of the sacrificial crisis and pays very little attention to mimetic rivalry as the instigator of the surrogate victim mechanism.

escalation of mimetic violence that the community's sacrificial turning on Sula sought to preempt:

Old and young, women and children, lame and hearty, they killed, as best they could, the tunnel they were forbidden to build.

They didn't mean to go in, to actually go down into the lip of the tunnel, but in their need to kill it all, all of it, to wipe from the face of the earth the work of the thin-armed Virginia boys, the bull-necked Greeks and the knife-faced men who waved the leaf-dead promise, they went too deep, too far...

A lot of them died there. The earth, now warm, shifted; the first forepole slipped; loose rock fell from the face of the tunnel and caused a shield to give way. They found themselves in a chamber of water, deprived of the sun that had brought them there. (*S*, 161-162)

The luminous ecstasy of unanimous violence, "the sun that had brought them there," ends in "a chamber of water," a whirlpool of undifferentiated destruction on a seemingly eschatological scale.

What precedes this communal apocalypse<sup>10</sup> is a more archaic and tribal form of sacrificial violence still contained within its ritualistic restraints and targeted against a single victim, namely Sula. The very fact that Sula, having died the previous year from natural, though possibly psychosomatic, causes, is no longer there to be sacrificed, is the reason the impromptu festival lives up to its suicidal name, "The National Suicide Day," coined by its founder, the village idiot, Shadrack, and ends in the collapse of order and not its maintenance. The Bottomers are too bogged down by their fundamental undifferentiation to successfully differentiate between themselves as a unanimous front and any would-be scapegoat figure to be left outside of this front.

Were it not for its disastrous ending in multiple deaths, the Bottomers' parade would actually follow the archaic logic of a sacrificial feast quite faithfully. The stillborn ritual in *Sula* bears striking resemblance to a successful one described in an Aztec myth which has as its hero an equivalent of the Greek Dionysus figure, Tezcatlipoca, whose foundational murder is the culmination point in a cathartic community gathering. The Mesoamerican story is analyzed by Gil Bailie from the point of view of a sacrificial crisis resolved:

[Tezcatlipoca] danced and sang, like a frenzied Dionysus, and the people followed him wherever he went. As those fascinated by him grew in number, the fascination grew in intensity. Like a bacchanalian pied piper littering the cultural landscape with the discarded taboos and customs once so scrupulously observed, Tezcatlipoca led his revelers out to the river. So great was the throng, the myth tells us, that the bridge

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<sup>10</sup> Notice, that even though the white construction site is attacked, the only casualties are the blacks themselves.

over the river collapsed under the weight and many people fell and were turned into stone. (Bailie 1995, 102)

Bailie goes on to contend that it is only in myths that people turn to stone, the reality being actually that of *stoning*, i.e., mob violence (ibid.). Morrison's novel is not a myth, but an unmasking of one in fictional form, and therefore her text states quite plainly that the people involved in the collapse of the tunnel died because of their desire for violence, "their need to kill it all."

After the disaster described in the Tezcatlipoca story, the hero is stoned to death, at his own insistence no less (Bailie 1995, 104). However, in *Sula*, Tezcatlipoca's equivalent, Shadrack, who initiates the procession, is not murdered. Rather, he is one of the few surviving witnesses of the catastrophe. It is the absence of a proper victim that ultimately deprives the Bottom of the cathartic outlet that the community in the Aztec myth comes to enjoy. This lack results in the eruption of a crisis that has already been brewing and that is symptomatic of the Judeo-Christian / secular modernity (as opposed to mythological religiosity) of the culture at large. In the interim between Sula's celebrated death and the collective suicide in the tunnel, it has dawned on the Bottomers that scapegoating, even in its symbolic and non-physical form as it was employed in the projected guilt of Sula and the Schadenfraude experienced at her death, is no longer possible. The epidemic that followed in spite of Sula's death could not be blamed on her or anyone else, even a marginal figure like Shadrack who is something of a village idiot and as close to a Greek *pharmakos* as one can get in twentieth-century America. But this crisis of differentiation also brings with it a need to compensate. It is this *over-*compensation of the loss of the scapegoat that leads to a surplus of violence in the tunnel episode.

It is only in the year following Sula's death that Bottomers celebrate the "National Suicide Day," an annual tradition founded by Shadrack, a shell-shocked veteran of World War I. Until that moment Shadrack has been the only participant of his own feast that he instigated as a form of therapy for his gnawing fear of death and offered in vain to share with the others:

On the third day of the new year, he walked through the Bottom down Carpenter's road with a cowbell and a hangman's rope calling the people together. Telling them that this was their only chance to kill themselves or each other.

At first the people in the town were frightened; they knew Shadrack was crazy but that did not mean that he didn't have any sense or, even more important, that he had no power. [...].

As time went along, the people took less notice of these January thirds, or rather they thought they did, thought they had no attitudes or feelings one way or another

about Shadrack's annual solitary parade. In fact they had simply stopped remarking on the holiday because they had absorbed it into their thoughts, into their language, into their lives. (*S*, 14-15)

A self-made high priest, Shadrack tries to whip people up into a sacrificial frenzy, albeit one carnivalistically contained in a single "holiday." It is noteworthy that even though Shadrack has named the carnival as one of suicide, he also encourages people to kill each other. This seeming contradiction is a further implication of Morrison's insight into the reciprocal nature of violence, one that becomes evident during the National Suicide Day of 1941 when the villagers for the first – and ironically, also the last – time follow Shadrack's lead by parading with him and finally making their way to the tunnel where many of them are annihilated. Like Dionysus of Euripides's *The Bacchae* or the Pied Piper of Hamelin in the eponymous fairy-tale, Shadrack drives his cultic followers to destruction while he himself escapes unscathed (at least, in a strictly physical sense; *S*, 162) – much like his namesake, Shadrach, who, through divine intervention, defied those who would sacrifice him by walking through a fiery furnace in "The Book of Daniel."

Shadrack is also reminiscent of another biblical figure, one from the New Testament: an outcast on whom the society that cast him out grows to depend on, he is not dissimilar to the "Legion" of Gerasa, the demon-possessed man cured by Jesus in the Gospels of Mark and Luke whom Girard singles out in one of his analyzes about mimetic desire as unmasked by the Bible.<sup>11</sup> Like "Legion," Shadrack also masochistically sets himself up as an outcast, although not in quite as violent terms, since he does not stone himself (cf. Girard 1989, 170). Shadrack and the Bottom do however establish a status quo of continuing symbolic sacrifice that resembles the more overtly sadomasochistic symbiosis between "Legion" and the Gerasenes.

The tunnel disaster should not be interpreted as a crime engineered by Shadrack or a conscious act of mass suicide by the Bottomers, but rather as the logical culmination of a sacrificial crisis, a meltdown of the scapegoating mechanism and the inevitable failure to ward off reciprocal violence. But before dealing with sacrificial crisis, let us first explore the workings of the single victim mechanism in Morrison's novel and the role Sula's character plays in it.

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<sup>11</sup> Of the Synoptic Gospels covering the Gerasa event, Matthew's has two possessed men instead of the one mentioned by Mark and Luke, and he omits the name "Legion" altogether. For a more detailed reading of the mimetic implications of the Gerasa episode in the different Gospels, see Girard's comparative reading in *The Scapegoat* (1982, English translation in 1986) which takes its cue from Jean Starobinski (1971. "La Démoniaque de Gerasa." In *Analyse structural et exégèse biblique*. Neuchatel: Labor fides. Pp. 63-94.).

### **“Let evil run its course”: The Single Victim Mechanism**

To interpret Morrison's *Sula* through Girard's mimetic theory is to universalize those aspects of the novel's characterization, setting and plotting that seem to call for an emphasis on the particular, if not the singular. These include, most importantly, the race and gender of the African-American female protagonists Sula and Nel, as well as the historicity of the story that spans from the late nineteenth century to the mid-1960's, covering, among other things, the First World War, the Great Depression, the Second World War, and the coming of age of the Civil Rights Movement. But universalization does not necessarily amount to trivialization. On the contrary, what Girard calls a “fundamental anthropology” may be just the thing needed to prevent Morrison's work from being reduced to its ethnic, epochal and gender particulars, while still recognizing their invaluable role in the whole that transcends them.

Nowhere is this dialectic of the universal and the particular more evident in Morrison's *Sula* than in the titular character's narrative situation. Sula is a member of her society, a black woman among other black women in an all-black neighbourhood of a racially segregated small town. However, for reasons that are far from self-evident, she becomes that society's scapegoat. True, her gender makes her vulnerable, since it is often implied by the omniscient narrator that the sexual transgressions of women are more severely frowned upon than those of men; the alpha male Ajax is given free rein to cause violent rivalry among the many women he beds as a matter of course (*S*, 125); also, black men are allowed to desire white women, whereas a black woman voluntarily sleeping with a white man is deemed guilty of the one sin that apparently can never be forgiven (*S*, 112-113). But even the loose morals of other women are *a posteriori* tolerated to a great extent without their risking ostracism from the community. This is equally true for Sula's late mother Hannah who was unapologetically adulterous (though in an endearing way that seemed to flatter the philandering husbands and their betrayed wives alike; *S*, 115) and China, the most notorious of the local prostitutes who has had a child by a white man (*S*, 172).<sup>12</sup> Moreover, the two eccentric matriarchs with textbook qualifications for falling prey to patriarchal witch-hunts, Eva Peace and Ajax's “evil

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<sup>12</sup> With regard to Morrison's portrayal of prostitutes, it is interesting that, according to Cynthia A. Davis's reading of *The Bluest Eye* (1970), they are “freed by exclusion from society [...]” (Davis 2012, 332). In *Sula*, by contrast, the prostitute characters are not comparable to Sula's radical exclusion from society (as are the prostitutes of *The Bluest Eye*, in Davis's view, to Pecola Breedlove, the scapegoat equivalent to Sula in that novel). That the prostitutes of *Sula* are much more abiding ‘citizens’ of the Bottom than the eponymous character is evident from the inclusive way China's funeral is commemorated as opposed to that of Sula (*S*, 171-172).

conjure woman” mother, are not only spared abuse but are considered valuable contributors to Bottom society.

So if it is not Sula’s sexual behaviour and transgression of gender roles that brand her as a pariah, could it be her ethnic identity? Race is a volatile issue in the segregated society of the fictional but all too realistic city of Medallion, Ohio, where the lighter shades of dark skin are viewed with hostile suspicion by the “pitch-black truebloods” of the Bottom (*S*, 52). Still, it is not the “heavy brown” Sula who borders on being branded as a despised mulatto, but Nel whose skin is “the color of wet sand paper” (*S*, 52) and whose mother Helene Wright has notions of making her daughter appear whiter than she is by straightening her hair with a comb and narrowing her nose with a clothespin. Sula has a distinguishing physical characteristic, though, a birthmark near her eye the shape of a stemmed rose, but this is not a racial feature. It does, however, single her out as a communal victim, or more aptly, justify her social castigation after the fact, since exceptional external markings are known to serve as excuses for designating the victim (a classic example would be Oedipus’s limp; cf. e.g., Girard 1989, 25).

It seems that there is nothing particularly singular in Sula’s character in the novel’s actual textual world, the case against her being one of arbitrary projection.<sup>13</sup> It is true that racial and sexual tensions are essential motives behind Sula’s scapegoating by Bottomers. But, it could be argued, the social dynamic of instigating and maintaining the surrogate victim mechanism parallels that of other societies regardless of their ethnic make-up and gender bias.

The singling out of Sula as surrogate victim against whom the Bottom can direct its various anxieties (i.e., family tensions, sexual conflicts, racial inferiority complexes, lack of social status and self-esteem, poverty, illness, unemployment), is motivated by her somewhat exceptional bond with her environment; she is an insider and an outsider at the same time. Like Pelagia Goulimari puts it: “Here, scapegoating of African-Americans by African-Americans relies on the distinction between inside and outside. The exemplary scapegoat is defined by maximal contact with the outside world” (Goulimari 2012, 197). Goulimari seems here to echo Girard according to whom the victim must be different from those who sacrifice her so as to disguise the sameness characterizing the mimetic conflict of symmetrical rivalry, but also similar with them because otherwise the transference of guilt would lack the social continuum that substitution requires in order to function as an outlet for the community it

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<sup>13</sup> About the tendency to stress the singularity of Morrison’s heroines while still tying this singularity with the rather narrow racial and gender issues, see e.g., Ledbetter 1993 and Goulimari 2012.

seeks to restore (Girard 2005, 5-6), as well as Derrida who defines the *pharmakos* ritual as taking place on the “boundary line between inside and outside” (Derrida 1981, 133).

Consistent with this inside / outside delineation, Sula has been absent from her hometown for ten years during which time she has graduated from college (an unconventional move for a black girl from a poor rural background) and roamed the big cities, the result of which is advanced sexual experience and an air of urbane sophistication. Her arrival causes a stir among the populace that is partly excited, partly prejudiced:

She was dressed in a manner that was as close to a movie star as anyone would ever see. [...]. By the time she reached the Bottom, the news of her return had brought the black people out on their porches or to their windows. There were scattered hellos and nods but mostly stares. A little boy ran up to her saying, “Carry yo’ bag, ma’am?”. Before Sula could answer his mother had called him, “You, John. Get back in here.” (S, 90-91)

It is only later that this mixture of solicitous curiosity, conventional politeness and hostile reserve is transformed into a full-blown antagonism; by the time Sula has her grandmother Eva committed to an old people’s home run by white authorities and has had her marriage-wrecking affair with Nel’s husband Jude, the tide has irrevocably turned against her. It is then and only then that the vague rumour about Sula having calmly watched her mother burn to death while the latter had accidentally caught fire is stirred up and becomes common knowledge (S, 112). As it turns out, Sula is guilty of this act of sadistic voyeurism born out of her misguided resentment towards Hannah whom she suspects of not loving her. But the Bottomers do not know this and did not pay attention to her possible guilt at the time. Soon Sula is subjected to a landslide of accusations, some of them more false than others but none exclusive to her alone (e.g., adultery, interracial relationships) and some downright superstitious (her supposedly eternal youth and invulnerable health).

The fact that Sula has been away for so long actually makes her *less* guilty of the evils affecting the Bottom. It is precisely her relative innocence that makes her an ideal substitute for the truly guilty, since to meet out punishment where punishment is due would lead to an endless series of reciprocal acts of violence. Moreover, having severed her ties with her remaining friends (Nel) and family members (Eva) Sula has no one left to avenge for her victimization. Sacrifice is, as Girard sums up, “primarily an act of violence without risk of vengeance” (2005, 13).

All this makes Sula a perfect surrogate victim, one that her community seems to find very useful, even though the idea of resorting to actual mob violence is alien to Bottomers:

In spite of their fear, they reacted to an oppressive oddity, or what they called evil days, with an acceptance that bordered on welcome. Such evil must be avoided, they felt, and precautions must naturally be taken to protect themselves from it. But they let it run its course, fulfil itself, and never invented ways either to alter it, to annihilate it or to prevent its happening again. So also were they with people. (S, 89-90)

Even if Sula's victimizing does not amount to physical violence, it is nevertheless structured according to the logic of scapegoating, the actual physical nature of which, though deterred *ad infinitum*, is always a lurking possibility. The fact that the Bottomers need a surrogate victim is made clear by the omniscient narrator who states that "[t]heir conviction of Sula's evil changed them in accountable yet mysterious ways" and that "[o]nce the source of their personal misfortune was identified, they had leave to love and protect one another" (S, 117). The narrator's statement also underlines a united front of Bottomers being constructed *against* Sula. Bottomers make Sula out to be an incarnation of evil, no matter how tolerant they are of that evil in allowing it to exist.

In order for the scapegoating mechanism to work it must be unconscious and unaware of its unjust and arbitrary logic. In retrospect, Sula's projected evil is sugar-coated with a mythological determinism, and natural phenomena are read as omens forecasting her arrival. (Cf. Girard 2005, 87). On her way back to the Bottom after a decade of absence, Sula is accompanied by "a plague of robins" (S, 89) and she is identified with these birds that penetrate the human habitat much in the same way as do the locusts in "Exodus": "The little yam-breasted shuddering birds were everywhere, exciting very small children away from their usual welcome into a vicious stoning. Nobody knew why or where they had come" (S, 89). When Sula dies, the community rejoices at what they construe as "a strong sense of hope" (S, 151), and even though they had no hand in her death, they detect a straight link between what appears as God's due punishment of Sula ("[...] His mighty thumb having been seen at Sula's throat."; S, 151) and a new era of prosperity ("The death of Sula Peace was the best news folks up in the Bottom had had since the promise of work at the tunnel."; S, 150). Of course, as the reader finds out, the economic promise does not materialize and the winter following Sula's demise is the harshest ever seen, complete with ice, illness and food shortage on an unprecedented scale. And because Sula is no longer there to bear the brunt, the Bottomers' frustration erupts into old conflicts with no outlet in sight. The sacrificial feast is ruined, as is evident from "a wretched Thanksgiving" (S, 152) and a "Christmas [...]" too



shabby to cut clean but too heavy to ignore” (S, 154). Nature has produced the mythological plagues, but this time there is no god or demon to blame for them.

Deprived of their surrogate victim, the community is torn by ever-escalating inner strife.<sup>14</sup> Also, for the first time it is unable to resist the brewing conflict between another community, namely the whites. This fatal sully of sacrificial violence is partially foreseen by Shadrack; although acting as the ultimate trigger for the tunnel disaster, he is actually on the verge of deconstructing his own cult. This disillusionment is evidenced in his initial reluctance to celebrate the suicide day that ends so badly, and this is because he has been brought face to face with the concrete reality of Sula’s death when he accidentally comes across her body in the house of the undertaker for whom he works: “So he had been wrong. Terribly wrong. No ‘always’ at all. Another dying away of someone whose face he knew” (S, 157-158). This sense of inevitable decay casts a shadow over Shadrack’s “Suicide Day” ritual and prefigures its sacrificial failure: “But it was not heartfelt this time, not loving this time, for he no longer cared whether he helped them or not. His rope was improperly tied; his bell had a tinny unimpassioned sound. His visitor was dead and would come no more” (S, 158).

Sula, who is well aware of her role as pariah and is partly pleased by the outrage she causes in the town whose resentment she reciprocates, predicts this sacrificial crisis on her deathbed to Nel. Her prophecy also sheds light on the racial aspect of the meltdown of what are considered the fundamental differences (regarding sexuality and age, as well as race) maintaining social order. When Nel declares that her former friend can hardly blame the community for not loving her, Sula replies in the future tense:

“Oh, they’ll love me all right. It will take time but they’ll love me.” [...]. “After all the old women have lain with the teen-agers; when all the young girls have slept with their old drunken uncles; after all the black men fuck all the white ones; when all the white women kiss all the black ones; when the guards have raped all the jailbirds and after all the whores make love to their grannies; after all the faggots get their mothers’ trim; when Lindbergh sleeps with Bessie Smith and Norma Shearer makes it with Stepin Fetchit; after all the dogs have fucked all the cats and every weathervane on every barn flies off the roof to mount the hogs...then there’ll be a little love left over for me. And I know just what it will feel like.” (S, 145-146)

This prophecy (with parodic references to Isaiah 11:6, where peaceful co-existence of humans and animals, as well as different species of animals is a marked contrast to violent

<sup>14</sup> In *The Scapegoat*, Girard writes about how archaic communities equate natural motives of sacrifice with social ones: “Admittedly, scapegoats cure neither real epidemics nor droughts nor floods. But the main dimension of every crisis is the way in which it affects human relations. [...]. The scapegoat is only effective when human relations have broken down in crisis, but he gives the impression of effecting external causes as well, such as plagues, droughts, and other objective calamities” (Girard 1989, 43).

undifferentiation) predicts the end to the ritual restraints and social taboos carefully guarded in archaic communities, but ones that Judeo-Christian / secular modernity has ceased to enforce since it can no longer believe in essential differences and can no longer justify sacrificial substitution. What remains of sacrifice is at best a conservative nostalgia for the victim who bore the guilt of the community and was retrospectively revered as a god or a goddess because of the peace he or she brought to the tribe. It is this nostalgia, after all, that has retained the sacrificial institutions of the Christian churches despite the Gospel message of siding with victims, and, in the case of *Sula*, has managed to postpone the inevitable crisis for so long until its eruption in the tunnel disaster. It is not by chance that Morrison has given her protagonist the last name "Peace," for Sula's funeral rites promise to bring the Bottom a renewed unanimity and protect it against its own anger towards the white part of Medallion. In the end, this promise fails, as history finally catches up with the Bottom and strips it of its archaic remnants.

### **"We was girls together.": Recognizing Sameness**

The various social and collective implications of mimetic desire in *Sula* should not distract the reader from the central dyadic relationship of the novel, namely the friendship-turned-rivalry of Sula and Nel. The two women resemble the many sets of best friends in Shakespeare's plays who start by emulating each other in a benign fashion, but once their desires converge on an object that cannot be shared, become immersed in bitter conflict (cf. Girard 2004, 9). In *Sula*, as in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, the two childhood friends are happy to share everything until erotic love and marriage make their appearance in the life of one friend; in *Sula*, Nel's marriage to Jude and his subsequent affair with Sula spell tragedy precisely because the other friend manages to grab the object that in Shakespeare's comedy is left to the friend who had 'it' in the first place.<sup>15</sup>

In *Sula*, the two friends are reconciled only decades after the initial falling-out, and the reconciliation takes place when one of them has been dead for almost the same amount of time. After the tunnel disaster, *Sula*'s narrative jumps ahead twenty-four years to the year 1965. This time it is Nel who returns to what used to be the Bottom but is now turned into a golf course. It is the heyday of the civil rights movement and racial equality has increased

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<sup>15</sup> Girard explains the Shakespearean conflict in typically anthropological fashion in an essay on *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, in which Proteus who has thus far harmoniously imitated the desires of his best friend Valentine does not realize that a love interest cannot be shared in the same unproblematic way that, for example, artistic and culinary interests can (Girard 2004, 9).

considerably compared to what it was in the interwar period when Nel and Sula reached maturity. The eroding of social hierarchies has not reached the apocalyptic stage Sula predicted while dying, but it is now a recognized fact. And just like sacrificial conservatives, Nel cannot help missing the old times while admitting that material and class conditions at least have improved (“Things were so much better in 1965. Or so it seemed.”; *S*, 163). But Nel’s external visit is soon overshadowed by an internal journey of discovery when she meets Eva in the old people’s home she has come to in order to do charity work. Eva, now senile, demonstrates moments of moral lucidity, ironically by way of incoherent and even spiteful behaviour towards Nel. What frightens the younger woman is that Eva not only knows about Nel’s role in Chicken Little’s death but furthermore makes no distinction between her and Sula’s involvement in the crime:

“Tell me how you killed that little boy.”

[...].

“I didn’t throw no little boy in the river. That was Sula.”

“You. Sula. What’s the difference? You was there. You watched, didn’t you? Me, I never would’ve watched.”

[...].

Eva stopped ironing and looked at Nel. For the first time her eyes looked sane.

“You think I’m guilty?” Nel was whispering.

Eva whispered back, “Who would know that better than you?” (*S*, 168-169)

The scene between the older and the younger woman echoes the final meeting between Raskolnikov and Porfiry Petrovich in *Crime and Punishment*, although Eva, having murdered her son Plum, does not hold the moral high ground of a legal authority. Also, Nel, unlike Raskolnikov, has not sought deliberate moral transgression but, on the contrary, has been only too happy to hold Sula (who was actually spinning the little boy around before accidentally losing her grip of his hands) as the one responsible for the death. However, now that she looks back, Nel realizes that she did experience a cathartic high over the child’s violent demise:

All these years she had been secretly proud of her calm, controlled behaviour when Sula was uncontrollable, her compassion for Sula’s frightened and shamed eyes. Now it seemed that what she had thought was maturity, serenity and compassion was only the tranquillity that follows a joyful stimulation. Just as the water closed peacefully over the turbulence of Chicken Little’s body, so had contentment washed over her enjoyment. (*S*, 170)

With this flash of self-recognition, Nel finds herself in the position of the false mother of the Judgment of Solomon (1 Kings 3:16-28); while Sula (the ‘true mother’) is terrified of having

caused the death of a child, Nel gives no thought to Chicken Little's suffering, but is consumed with invidious comparison with regard to Sula.<sup>16</sup> The realization of her guilt is brought home by Eva's peculiar semantics; the older woman accuses Nel of "watching" Chicken Little drown, whereas Nel at first insists that her witnessing the tragic event was not a matter of watching but merely "seeing":

What did old Eva mean by *you watched*? How could she help seeing it? She was right there. But Eva didn't say *see*, she said *watched*. "I did not watch it. I just saw it." But it was there anyway, as it had always been, the old feeling and the old question. The good feeling she had had when Chicken's hands slipped. She hadn't wondered about that in years. "Why didn't I feel bad when it happened? How come it felt so good to see him fall? (*S*, 170; italics in the original)

"Seeing" implies the innocence of the witness, whereas "watching," through its suggested voyeuristic pleasure, implies complicity. In accordance with the etymology of 'martyr,' the witness sides with the victim, whereas the voyeur identifies, if only unconsciously and vicariously, with the sacrificers: the high priest or the lynching mob.

The insight Nel has into her personal guilt has wider implications with regard to the Bottom as a community. Nel, who has stood by while her former best friend was being scapegoated now realizes what it means to identify emotionally with those committing sacrificial violence. She also recognizes the universal nature of scapegoating and sees for the first time the hitherto hidden machinery of arbitrary projection that enables it. Not only are Nel and Sula equally responsible for Chicken Little's death, but Sula, like Chicken Little, holds the universal status of the victim. Indeed, Nel is even more guilty than Sula because of the pleasure she felt as opposed to Sula who was distraught by the tragic outcome of the play that Chicken Little actually enjoyed while it lasted. On the other hand, Sula has her moment of voyeuristic and sadistic catharsis when she watches her mother burn and does not intervene. The third victimizer is Eva, who deliberately sets her son Plum on fire, not out of spite, but because she cannot bear him to grow dependent on her and endanger her hard-won autonomy. All these transgressions serve to show, how nobody is innocent of the common sacrificial and rivalrous atmosphere of the Bottom.

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<sup>16</sup> The mimetic conflict between the two mothers in "1 Kings" is discussed at length by Girard (1987, 237-245) and Oughourlian (2010, 7). In *Sula*, Sula and Nel do not compete over the motherhood of Chicken Little, since neither is his mother; nor do they fight over saving his life or letting him die, since he is already past saving. However, also in Morrison's novel, the reaction of two characters over the suffering of a child is split between the other thinking about the child and the other thinking about *the other character*.

After running away from Eva, the distraught Nel finds her way to the cemetery where Sula is buried with other members of the Peace family. Carved in the gravestone are only the dates of birth and death with no first names included, so that the list of persons, all of them named "Peace," reads "like a chant" (S, 170-171). To this impersonal hymn of sacrificial continuum, the remorseful Nel adds an elegy of her own, but one that distinguishes the individual from the myth written in stone<sup>17</sup>:

"All that time, all that time, I thought I was missing Jude." And the loss pressed down on her chest and came up into her throat. "We was girls together," she said as though explaining something. "O Lord, Sula," she cried, "girl, girl, girlgirlgirl."

It was a fine cry—loud and long—but it had no bottom and it had no top, just circles and circles of sorrow. (S, 174)

After demythologizing Sula's gravestone in her mind, Nel realizes that she herself has been the proverbial whited sepulchre. Her anti-sacrificial breakthrough is accentuated by her crossing paths with Shadrack who had similar, though only provisional, insights as to the futility of archaic ritual. Significantly enough, the narrator divulges that "Shadrack and Nel moved into opposite directions, each thinking separate thoughts about the past", and that, "The distance between them increased as they both remembered gone things" (S, 174). The "distance" between the two characters could signify their varying degrees of sacrificial and mimetic conversions, with Nel experiencing a rejuvenation of her friendship with Nel, whereas Shadrack achieved mere disillusionment as he faced the loss of connection he sensed he had with the young Sula who came to him in panic after Chicken Little's drowning and whom he comforted with a promise of everlasting life with the ambiguous statement, "'Always. Always'" (S, 63).

Nel's final complaint that brings the novel to a close is an acknowledgment of the individual value of life (Sula is singled out from the rest of her family) and a realization of universal connectedness of all people ("We was girls together."). Given the prominence of racial themes in Morrison's novel, it is worthy to note that the sorrow Nel feels for Sula has

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<sup>17</sup> In his analysis of sacrificial violence that draws heavily from Girard, Gil Bailie writes: "The tomb of those who died violently is a myth in stone. Both the myths and the tombs relate the story of past violence and give it meaning. They exonerate those who fall under their mythic influence from moral responsibility for collective violence. They edify and unify the mourners" (Bailie 1995, 228). Girard himself maintains that, "What is essential is the cadaver as talisman, as the bearer of life and fertility; the culture always develops as a *tomb*. The tomb is nothing but the first human monument to be raised over the surrogate victim, the first elemental and fundamental matrix of meaning. There is no culture without a tomb and no tomb without a culture; in the end the tomb is the first and only cultural symbol" (Girard 1987, 83; italics in the original). This excerpt by Girard includes an end note (number 33, Book I) that refers to his analysis of Jesus's "metaphor of the tomb," analyzed in the same work (*Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World*; Girard 1987, 163-167).

no bottom and no top. This vertical metaphor echoes the racial hierarchy of Medallion – and is thus a sign of *deviated* transcendence – where ironically the Bottom constitutes of hills, whereas the richer valley land is owned by the whites. In the circles of universal mourning of one's neighbour, it seems, there is ultimately no difference between black and white.<sup>18</sup>

## 2.2 The 'Mimetic' Text and the 'Novelistic Truth': The Narrative Nature of Girard's Mimetic Theory

"Narratives are supported by plots, and plots live from characters plotting against each other" (Ryan 1991, 7). The very notion of 'plot' as a struggle between subjects over some object or status would thus suggest an inherent affinity with Girard's concept of mimetic desire. What then are the novel insights that a 'novelistic' approach à la Girard can contribute to narrative theory at large?

In his article, "Narrators, Narratees, and Mimetic Desire" (2010), Amit Marcus explores the possibilities Girard's mimetic theory has for enriching the field of 'postclassical' narratology, with an emphasis on the level of narration. Marcus strives to salvage Girard's credibility as a literary scholar, hitherto marred by his "Catholicism, his partly unjustified reputation as a political reactionary, and what is perceived by some as the reductiveness of his theory" (Marcus 2010, 210). Speaking less ideologically, perhaps the most obvious hindrance for Girard's systematic engagement with the workaday details of narrative theory is his distrust of structuralism whose binary opposites he finds distract from the unity of his anthropological project and which still exercise a large influence on the narratological field. One such binary pair is, of course, the Saussurian signifier / signified relation, but even in the less linguistic differentiation between 'story' and 'discourse,' there appears to be more than a hint of dualism, a fact to which Seymour Chatman readily admits (Chatman 1980, 9). However, Chatman's story / discourse differentiation, when combined with the concept of 'implied author,' can help unearth the unifying principle (if there is one to be unearthed) of a narrative text that deals with the overcoming of mimetic desire. James Phelan's emphasis on the distinction between *experiencing* and *telling* is an even more expedient narratological tool when discussing the psychological and spiritual progressions undergone by main characters in

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<sup>18</sup> This suggestion of color-blindness – or gender-blindness for that matter – in the scene of Nel's conversion may sound a suspicious note, since her spiritual reunion with Sula signifies a union between two black women. However, while race is of high priority in the social dynamics of Medallion as a whole and the Bottom as its enclave, Nel's unmasking of the scapegoating mechanism of her community could be read as an insight transcending the racial binaries underlying that community's sacrificial structure that are also evident in Sula's darkness and Nel's lightness.

the novels at hand. Phelan's emphasis on the mingling of the perspectives of 'the narrating-I' and the 'experiencing-I' is less dualistic than Chatman's insistence on a strict distinction between story and discourse (the supposed impossibility of homodiegetic narrators to "pierce the discourse membrane to experience the story world directly"; Chatman 1978, 144<sup>19</sup> /cit. Phelan 2001, 55), and thus is more suitable for dealing with Girard's poetics of 'novelistic conclusion.'

How does the concept of mimetic desire fit in with the interpersonal relationships in the novels at hand that take on such forms as friend, rival, co-conspirator, usurper, mentor, disciple, etc.? How do the fictional communities come to terms with their tendency to resort to scapegoating, and how does the unleashing of uncontrollable violence affect them? How do individual characters and the collectives of characters realize their identity project? In what ways do their strategies of differentiation (racial segregation in Morrison's *Sula*, academic snobbery in Tartt's *The Secret History*, professional pride in McEwan's *Amsterdam*, perceived artistic boldness in Hustvedt's *What I Loved*, politico-religious affiliation in Spark's *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*) work or fail? And most importantly, what sort of solutions concerning the self's relationship with the Other do the characters come up with by the time the plots unravel?

These questions pertaining to the story world are best answered by exploring the ways in which the narrative discourse manipulates the points of view in the text and suggests an interpretation that the textual whole condones and recommends to the reader. With regard to the hierarchies inherent in (or absent from) the 'perspective structure' of a given text, it is important to determine, as Ansgar Nünning has pointed out, "to what degree the narrator-perspective is individualized, and whether the narrative instance coordinates the various perspectives and integrates them into a unified worldview" (Nünning 2001, 217).

In order to determine the 'mimetic' dynamics of each novel, one could do worse than to study their perspective structures. The inner hierarchies of the narrative texts reveal a lot about the way mimetic desire between characters is revealed to the reader and brought under scrutiny. For example, in McEwan's *Amsterdam*, the perspective shifts from character to character, with the omniscient narrator remaining tacitly detached from the action, letting the characters do most of the focalization. The exact opposite is true, however, of the narrator-character relationships in Spark's *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* in which the narrator cheerfully offers 'her' insights concerning the mindsets of the characters. Nevertheless,

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19 Chatman, Seymour B. 1978. *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press.

despite the activity of the self-assertive yet disembodied narrator, Spark's novel also leaves a lot of room for character focalization, especially (though not exclusively) with regard to the main character, Sandy Stranger. Compared with both McEwan and Spark, the third novel to employ a third-person narrator, Morrison's *Sula*, seems more related to the latter, with the narrator actively second-guessing the characters' motives, although avoiding the sense of superiority and almost theological aloofness which at times characterize Spark's narration.<sup>20</sup>

Of the five novels studied here, Tartt's *The Secret History* and Hustvedt's *What I Loved* employ first-person narration. The fact that the narrators of these texts are also characters in the story world adds a confessional tone to their narrative progression. Still, the tension between the implied author and the narrator remains strong, and the narrators are by no means the definitive authorities of their narrative universes. As Nünning maintains, the first-person narrator's perspective is often slanted, because it "tends to highlight the discrepancy between the actual textual world and the subjective world-model of the experiencing I and the often equally partial recollections of the homodiegetic narrator" (Nünning 2001, 219).

Despite the undeniable subjectivity of the homodiegetic narrator, it is also telling that Nünning makes an allowance for objective reality (at least, in the context of the narrative setting). Indeed, the subjectivity of the narrator is measured against this objective reality, or what Nünning, taking his cue from Marie-Laure Ryan, calls "the actual textual world"; according to Ryan's "principle of minimal departure," the reader has an undeniable tendency to relate the fictional depiction of the textual universe "as far as possible to our representation of AW [AW='actual world']" (Ryan 1991, 51<sup>21</sup>/ Nünning 2001, 210-211).

Although Nünning suggests that the recollections of the narrating-I are often as "partial" as is the perspective of the experiencing-I, it is still important to emphasize the truth-seeking motivation, no matter how provisional and lacking, of the homodiegetic narrator's discourse.

In *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, the schism between the focalization of the main character, Sandy Stranger, while contemplating and emulating the behavior of her overpowering teacher, Miss Brodie, when the latter repeatedly ostracizes Sandy's classmate, Mary Macgreggor, and the ironical aloofness of the God-like omniscient narrator who reports the inner workings of Sandy's mind, seems deliberate on the (implied) authorial level, as it unmasks Sandy's suggestibility in joining other schoolgirls in scapegoating Mary.

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<sup>20</sup> Spark's God-like narration is sometimes viewed as an analogy / contrast to Miss Brodie's futile pursuit of God-likeness (e.g., cf. Whittaker 1984, 106) while it has also been pointed out, that "[...] most of the time [Spark's] stories are narrated from some human, limited point of view" (Lodge 1986, 122).

<sup>21</sup> Ryan, Marie-Laure. 1991. *Possible Worlds, Artificial Intelligence and Narrative Theory*. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press.



Another case besides the relationship between omniscient narration and character focalization would be the first-person narrator's hindsight in condemning – or repressing – his mistakes as a character within his own story. In *The Secret History*, what keeps the main character and I-narrator, Richard Pape, from achieving the full power of a truly 'novelistic conversion,' is his continuing oscillation between admitting his complicity in the murder of the college 'loser,' Bunny Corcoran, masterminded by his admired fellow student, Henry Winter, and downplaying his role in the crime and underreporting his own mimetic ambition which he in large measure projects onto Henry. Although he comes very close, Richard never fully accepts his responsibility of the crime and he never completely demystifies Henry's supposed superiority and singularity.

Unlike Marcus, I want to hold on to the continuing legitimacy of Girard's emphasis on conversion, even though I admit that Girard's definition is at times too vague, whereas its explicitness in the story world is often too rigorously demanded. This is also why I feel that, in terms of narrative theory, the concept of the implied author would be a useful one, if not even vital, in exploring both the nature and manifestation of a character's 'conversion.' It is true, that if the character does not convert in the story, he or she does not convert at all. But the character's mind is not everything. There can also be a conversion of the text, in the sense that the discourse implicitly laments the failures of the characters and the adverse situations influencing the events in the story. Although the text is not an anthropomorphous entity, it can make manifest the desired-for outcomes for the lives of characters – even if these outcomes are not realized.

Although I partially agree that "[c]onversion is a historical convention that was prominent in nineteenth-century novels, which constitute the hard core of Girard's analysis" and that "this convention was increasingly subverted by novels from the twentieth century" (Marcus 2010, 209), I would still maintain that the Judeo-Christian morality (or, as Girard would put it, anthropology) has not lost its grip on contemporary literature, despite its growing pessimism in the face of cataclysmic world events and ideological shifts. According to Girard, the contemporary world, even outside the West, is more Christian than it is aware of. This Christianity is not to be equated with the historical church institutions or this and that religious denomination, but what for Girard is the singular achievement of the Gospel, namely the concern with the victims of violence and the realization of the shared guilt of all mankind in producing those victims. In contemporary novels it is very difficult not to find this message, even though the main characters of those novels may realize it too late for their own good – or the good of other characters.

The term ‘novelistic truth,’ deliberately broad as it is, seems much too vague for systematic narrative theory. Girard has good reasons for maintaining the extra-textual implications of the term, and although in his subsequent, more broadly anthropological work from *Violence and the Sacred* onwards he has all but dropped the concept of ‘novelistic truth’ from his theoretical vocabulary, he has not negated its meaning in retrospect. I feel that the study of contemporary literature especially, with its less explicit emphasis on the theme of conversion, would benefit from certain narratological applications, such as the implied author and the narrative perspective structure. My strong guess is, that even though not as frequent and emphatic than in its heyday in the nineteenth-century, conversion in Girard’s sense of the word still has its place as a narrative motif. However, due to increasing pessimism, the plots of some novels might leave these conversions unrealized but nonetheless implicitly deplore the lack of conversion by putting its *possibility* forward as a *desirable* outcome –an outcome that, alas, was not to be.

Of the novels studied, Ian McEwan’s *Amsterdam* seemingly stands out as a particularly non-conversional work. One need not be reminded of the author’s virulent atheism to conclude that the novel’s highly dysphoric ending hardly suggests the existence of a benevolent God (or any other kind of God for that matter). Still, the very godlessness of the story world is an indication of an underlying apocalyptic sensibility on the level of the text. Obviously, in a world where euthanasia doctors can be recruited as hired assassins, there was no saving Clive and Vernon from having each other murdered in their beds. But surely the authorial voice expresses a wish, no matter how covertly, that, in the best of all possible worlds, such pre-emptive measures – increased self-knowledge, forgiveness, kindness, or even a sense of humour curtailng one’s megalomania? – would be in great demand. Though factually absent, they would ideally be present. In terms of modal logic, at least, they would be *desirable*.<sup>22</sup>

But why make a Girardian case for a novel like *Amsterdam*? Surely Girard is not the only thinker who, in principle, advocates kindness over cruelty or friendship over enmity? Certainly not. Girard’s mimetic theory does, however, make an appealing case for reasons

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<sup>22</sup> In her highly influential treatise on Possible Worlds theory, Marie-Laure Ryan takes her cue from Tzvetan Todorov when she stresses the importance of desired (or feared, or in any case, speculated) narrative outcomes: “[Todorov] discovered that events considered possible by characters, but never enacted, had as much impact on the development of the plot as events presented as facts” (Ryan 1991, 3-4). The work by Todorov alluded to is *Grammaire du Décameron* (1969, The Hague: Mouton). It should be pointed out in this context, that Ryan is a vehement opponent of the implied author (cf. Ryan 2013), although she endorses the concept of authorship as such. Also, Todorov is talking about characters, not authorial intentions, implied or otherwise. However, desire as a narrative modality *per se* is addressed by both Todorov and Ryan, even though they do not discuss mimetic desire à la Girard.

that would cause friends to fall out over a mutually desired object, become the more resentful towards each other the more similar they become, and, with the absence of scapegoating possibilities, destroy each other. Reversely, mimetic theory presents a radical – by definition almost impossibly so – means of pre-empting such a disaster: recognition of these potentially destructive incentives in the self and in the Other. This recognition is radical, because it entails the complete rejection of violence, in all its forms, even in the supposedly ‘good’ or justified cases, such as (calculated) self-defence and revolutionary uprisings.

Not all novels chosen have such a negatively ‘mimetic’ outcome. As was demonstrated in chapter 2.1., Toni Morrison’s *Sula*, though concerned with a crisis of differentiation not unlike McEwan’s novel, has a radically different conclusion on the level of character interaction. In the final pages, what appears to be by chance, the main character Nel is suddenly made to realize how she and her former best friend, the now deceased Sula, are not so different after all. This realization prompts Nel to make a belated visit to Sula’s grave where she weeps in remorse of her role in the falling out of the two friends, while also forgiving Sula for seducing her husband. Furthermore, Nel realizes the injustice inherent in Sula’s having been ostracized by their village community.

In *Sula*, then, the ‘novelistic truth’ is realized on all levels of the text, whereas in *Amsterdam*, the desirability of a similar kind of conclusion is implied on the authorial level, but does not occur in the story or even in the narration.

Of the other novels, Siri Hustvedt’s *What I Loved* has a positive ending echoing *Sula*, in that the I-narrator and main character, Leo Hertzberg, comes to terms with the mimetic desire he feels for his seemingly superior friend, Bill Wechsler. However, Leo’s ‘conversion’ is not as radical as is Nel’s in *Sula*, for he never falls out with Bill, and never resents him as strongly as Nel does Sula. Leo’s narrative is, nonetheless, a journey of self-discovery and an opportunity to acquire better knowledge of the Other who is for a time put on a pedestal and deemed radically different from the self.

The most ambiguous endings are those of Muriel Spark’s *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* and Donna Tartt’s *The Secret History*. This is because the narrative delivers the main characters into a crossroads where they are presented with the option of either clinging on to their mimetic obsession, namely their idolatry of another character, or repudiating the false idol in favour of a more genuinely transcendent dimension. However, in the case of Tartt’s novel, Richard Pape is left half-way in the repudiation of his hero-worship of Henry Winter. *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* is even more baffling, because it is left completely open to the reader whether the recognition, articulated out loud to an interviewer, of Miss Brodie having

exercized a definite influence on Sandy in her childhood and youth, ushers in a new era for Sandy's existence. Or is she merely resigning to her fate as someone supposedly destined to be outshined by her mentor?

The fact that mimetic conflict remains unresolved on the story level of Tartt's and Spark's novels does not necessarily make them any less 'novelistic' on the level of the implied author. On the contrary, compared to Hustvedt's novel, it could be said that they are more engrossed in the problematic nature of mimetic desire. Hustvedt's *What I Loved*, on the other hand, seems to make the main character's repudiation of idolatry almost too easy. This lack of a definite problem to be solved would implicate the implied author as an accomplice to the character's 'Romantic lie.' However, Leo Hertzberg is not so much claiming his autonomy as he is remaining on a more external level of mediation where he acknowledges Bill's superior artistic gifts. Still, *What I Loved* is very much concerned with mimetic conflict, but the more internalized and intensely metaphysical mediations of desire are reserved for minor characters, such as Bill's son Mark and his criminal mentor Teddy Giles, as well as Bill's first wife Lucille whose idea of marriage is apparently much more 'Strindbergian' than is Bill's. Therefore, despite certain amount of 'Romantic' evasion, *What I Loved* still deserves to be treated in the same 'conversional' context as the other novels chosen.

Unlike Girard in *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, I am not concerned with the entire oeuvre or real-life developments of novelists. All five novels in the corpus of this study are from different authors. I will largely omit the biographical data on the real-life novelists from my discussion of their novels and employ instead the somewhat controversial narratological concept of the implied author. The reason I find the concept useful is that I wish to maintain the importance of distinguishing the characters' and the narrator's agency from that of the text design as a whole. However, the reliance on actual authorial agency would undoubtedly court the objections of those literary researchers (myself included) who distrust the invocation of strictly biographical mandates from flesh-and-blood authors.<sup>23</sup> The worst case scenario of biographism would of course be to mirror the authors' actual lives with their texts to the point where the changes in the former would dictate the changes in the interpretation of the latter. This said, the study at hand makes no contribution to the ongoing *conceptual* debate about the

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<sup>23</sup> This potential confusion between the historical author and the textual authority of the narrative work is of course the reason why Wayne C. Booth coined the term 'implied author' in the first place. However, the fear of confusing the two has been questioned as unbiased by, among other European (as opposed to many American) narratologists, Marie-Laure Ryan, who considers the implied part of the term redundant, since it is a given that authors do not invest their whole natural beings in the fictional universes they compose and therefore do not need to separate their second selves (as Booth calls the implied author) from their first selves (Ryan 2013). Although I tend to sympathize with many of Ryan's statements, I still employ the concepts of implied author and implied reader to avoid the Boothian confusion.

implied author, namely whether this textual function should be called ‘author,’ or whether it would be better to talk about a text design or a text intent. The study is, however, committed to the notion that such a function exists and that allowances should only rarely be made for a completely neutral or ‘polyphonic’ text. In order to determine the fecundity of Girard’s mimetic theory – this is to say, the entire arch of his theoretical ‘system’ – to narrative studies, an authorial level must be allowed to work its ‘authority,’ namely occupy its hierarchically superior command post, as it were, on top of the narrative perspective structure.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Conversion as defined by Girard, namely as an acknowledgement and transcendence of negative mimetic desire, is in literature confined to either taking place in the hearts and minds of novelistic characters, whether in their story world experience or, if they are also narrators, as a result of the character’s narrative process. These fictional character conversions then act as stand-ins for the actual conversions of the authors. However, of the texts Girard uses as examples for this kind of author-character analogy, Dostoevsky’s *Notes from the Underground* is problematic in that the main character, the nameless ‘underground man’ fails to convert in the manner of Raskolnikov or Dimitri Karamazov. In her article, “The Writer as Redeemed Prostitute: Girard’s Reading of Dostoevsky’s *Notes from Underground*” (2011), Ann W. Astell offers a way out of this impasse by arguing that the novella’s main character (or at least the author’s stand-in character) is not the I-narrator, the writer of the eponymous notes, but an altogether different character, namely the prostitute Liza. For Astell, Girard’s admission that *Notes* is important as a transitional work between the early, ‘Romantic’ Dostoevsky and the mature, ‘novelistic’ Dostoevsky is unnecessary, because the ‘novelistic’ conversion is fully achieved already in this work – but not through the perspective of the (ostensible) male protagonist (who is more of an antihero), but through the marginalized female perspective of Liza (the true heroine). Hers is a novelistic truth that transcends the underground man’s Romantic lie and thus mediates Dostoevsky’s real-life conversion to his readers.

Although I agree with Astell that Liza as a *character* is the moral center of *Notes*, I would look for ‘novelistic’ answers beyond the story world sphere of character actions and stake a claim for the implied author’s ‘conversion.’ Even if a benign model such as Liza did not exist in the story, the authorial perspective – whether implied or actual – would not necessarily align itself with that of the underground man just because he is the loudest agent of the narrative. This is not to say that the character of Liza is superfluous, but merely, that the ‘final word’ does not rest with her or any other *character*. In fact, it is the authorial level *as present in the text itself* (and not, for example, in Dostoevsky’s letters or his life’s events) that designates Liza as the benign agent that she is. The same authorial level is also responsible for making the ‘underground’ narrator the cautionary antihero that he is. The implied author is itself a mediator between the fictional world of the characters and the actual world of the ‘flesh-and-blood authors.’ That said, a character like Liza is illustrative of a more pervasive idea of conversion (in that this conversion still has a place in the story world and is not banished to the realm of the implied author) that nineteenth-century novelists still felt relatively comfortable with.

### 3 Fearful Symmetry: Mimetic Desire and Moral Transgression

In Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891), there is a dialogue between the world-weary dandy, Lord Henry Wotton, and the still uncorrupted main character. The dialogue concerns the nature of influence:

‘Have you really a very bad influence, Lord Henry? As bad as Basil says?’

‘There is no such thing as a good influence, Mr Gray. All influence is immoral – immoral from the scientific point of view.’

‘Why?’

‘Because to influence a person is to give him one’s own soul. He does not think his natural thoughts or burn with his natural passions. His virtues are not real to him. His sins, if there are such things as sins, are borrowed. He becomes an echo of someone else’s music, an actor of a part that has not been written for him.’ (p. 24-25)

Wilde’s text illustrates how the question of individuality and the problem of imitation have a way of taking on a metaphysical dimension (and not merely a social or a psychological one). *The Picture of Dorian Gray* belongs to that well established genre of ‘Faustian’ fiction, in which moral or spiritual integrity, namely the ‘purity of the soul,’ is traded in for a prize that can be measured by strictly material or ‘worldly’ standards. Moreover, narratives that deal with moral or spiritual transgression, are often preoccupied with a certain kind of character, often described as ‘Byronic,’ ‘Promethean’ or even ‘Satanic’ (cf. e.g., Bruffee 1983, 55).

In modern fiction of the so-called post-religious period, the theological drama of Good and Evil is much less explicit than in the earlier Faustian tradition. With the advent of Nietzsche’s “God is dead!” thesis,<sup>25</sup> omnipotence is no longer solely a quality attached to the God of Christianity or other deities, but something that a mortal being can possess and embody, at least to a point. Still, deities have long shadows, as does the Judeo-Christian tradition over the Western psyche. What Dorothy L. Sayers in her essay “The Faust Legend and the Idea of the Devil” (1946) calls the ‘Promethean set-up’ (“the proud sufferer defying omnipotence”; p. 234), is nevertheless present in novels of the twentieth century, albeit in a more prosaic guise than Goethe’s *Faust* or Milton’s *Paradise Lost*. Already in Wilde’s late nineteenth-century example, for instance, there is no character representing Satan as such. Instead, it is the “poisonous” influence (for example, through books lent; p. 172) that another character exercises over the protagonist that is demonic.

At first, however, it seems that what is risked through this uncanny influence is not so much the moral quality of what Lord Henry calls “one’s own soul” (since both the

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<sup>25</sup> Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra* (p. 5); see Works Cited.

individual's "virtues" and "sins" alike are at stake) as the very fact of *owning* one's soul, that is, being and remaining an autonomous individual. But what if this individuality is itself an object of imitation and influence? The obvious paradox of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is that while striving to make his own music, as it were, Dorian Gray becomes Lord Henry's echo; he has based his pursuit of autonomy on imitation of another, supposedly more self-contained personality. And yet this imitation of non-imitation is not the most potent conflict; even more troublesome is the fact that this imitation should never be admitted to and should on the contrary be dissimulated to the degree of actually hiding it from not only the Other but from the self.

Needless to say, the dissimulation of imitative desire, when viewed from Girard's theoretical standpoint, quickly becomes a virtual dead end, since the imitation of desire is what makes us human in the first place and is key to our very survival. However, Girard differentiates between more positive and / or neutral and negative dimensions of mimetic desire. According to Girard, *acquisitive mimesis* related to pursuing objects for their sake can give way to *conflictual mimesis* where only the relationship between two rivals matters (Girard 1987, 26). The mimetic rivalry is analogous to a kind of metaphysical apprenticeship, where the 'master' and the 'disciple' begin to mirror each other's innermost desires. The model of desire is at first flattered and pleased by the imitator's emulation and enjoys the role of aspiration figure. But once the other's imitation becomes too good, the 'master' starts to feel that his individuality is threatened, and the boundaries of his autonomous selfhood risk becoming blurred. Meanwhile, the imitator is increasingly frustrated in his desire to equal, not to mention surpass, the model, since this idol was singled out as one precisely because regarded as superior in the first place. (Girard 1976, 182; 1987, 327). Transgression plays a key role in this imitation game, since in order to feel truly autonomous, one must abide by no laws except one's own (Girard 1987, 387).

All the more ironic then is the proliferation of subjects with an equally 'autonomous' ambition of Superhumanity. This kind of metaphysical imitation of mediated desire results, quite logically, to a mass of would-be Supermen- and women. The similarity of desire leads to the imitator and the mediator becoming each other's doubles. The doubles then try to hide from each other, as well as from the self this fearful symmetry that in archaic society was pre-empted by various taboos (e.g., on twins and homosexuals), but that in a post-sacrificial society has free reign.

The following chapter deals with mimetic desire between the characters in the representative novels from the point of view of moral transgression, a theme often implied but

never quite detailed by Girard's own writings. Chapter 3.1. focuses on one character's pursuit of a Nietzschean Immoralist ethos through, paradoxically enough, imitation of another character deemed to possess a superior being. Chapter 3.2. then dissects the resulting moral and psychological hangover that begs the question of how the transgressive act – a crime of some kind – that was supposed to empower the subject in fact drives home the very fact of the imitative source of transgression; without a partnership in crime no crime would have been committed, no sense of autonomy asserted. Chapter 3.3. deals with the motif of the double which in Girard's thinking results from the kind of mimetic 'hangover' described above. Once sameness between the self and the Other becomes so intensive that it is almost unbearable, the self's psyche simulates a radical difference upon a symbolic or phantasmagoric object (such as a dream or a work of art) that nevertheless has its origins in reality.

Girard's theory of the double is merely an extension of his mimetic thought as a whole. Unlike early "double" scholars like Ralph Tymms who are mostly informed by the *Doppelgänger* motif of the fantasy and horror fiction dating from the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Romantic era, Girard treats doubles as real phenomena dealt by but not restricted to literary fiction. He does not reduce doubles to "the animistic theory of primitive religious practices" or to "modern psychiatry," both domains of which he views as essentially Romantic and thus more or less mythological (Girard 2005, 83). When dealing with literary texts, mimetic theory should not therefore be limited to supernatural motifs, but should also include realist elements within the fictional universe, namely interactions between characters who are not phantoms but 'real' people. To give a random example, we could point out, that of the two main works of Robert Louis Stevenson (a writer showcasing many Romantic and Realist attributes), *Treasure Island* is no less concerned with the theme of the double than *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. Even though the first work does not have a character phantasmagorically splitting up in two separate personalities, it nevertheless has a protagonist (Jim Hawkins) encountering a morally ambiguous role model-turned-antagonist (Long John Silver) who is both appealing and repulsive in the eyes of his protégé-turned-rival. And even though Jim Hawkins does not succumb to his double potentiality in the end as does Dr Jekyll, the possibility is there and the threat, albeit unrealized, is very real.

In the novels studied here, the doubles are very real, although they also take on hallucinatory and phantasmagoric reflections (e.g., the uncanny portraits in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* and *What I Loved*, and the purportedly successful Dionysiac epiphany in *The Secret History*). Even in a novel as preoccupied with the documentation of the prevailing



Zeitgeist like *Amsterdam* there are significant traces of epic transgression and tragic feuding that echo “The Book of Genesis” and Sophocles’s *Antigone*.

### 3.1 Imitation and Immoralism

Donna Tartt’s *The Secret History* employs a dense intertextuality, frequently alluding to a number of texts in the Western Literary Canon, with an emphasis on Classical literature, evoking the conventionally ‘Nietzschean’ readings of Greek tragedies and mythological texts. But with her themes of untenable immoralism, collective hysteria and ideological apprenticeship, Tartt also quite explicitly refers to Dostoevsky’s *Crime and Punishment*, *The Devils*, and *The Brothers Karamazov*, thus offering the reader a polemical interpretation of the *Übermensch* approach.<sup>26</sup>

The narrative climax of Tartt’s novel has Henry Winter, the self-appointed leader of the Greek students’ coterie, committing suicide. The apparent reason for this act of self-annihilation is that he is unable to stand being rejected by his teacher and mentor, Julian Morrow, once the latter finds out about the violent extremes of his students’ extra-curricular activities. The narrator Richard Papen is left alone with the ordeal of establishing how his own moral complicity has been brought about through his attachment with the personality of Henry. For Richard, Henry’s suicide is not a sign of failure, but a realization of his outlook on life, and essentially a heroic act: “I think he felt the need to make a noble gesture, something to prove to us and to himself that it was in fact possible to put those high cold principles which Julian had taught us to use. *Duty, piety, loyalty, sacrifice*” (*SH*, 612; italics in the original).

The favourite subject of Julian’s lectures is what he sees as a radical difference between the Ancient and Modern world views.<sup>27</sup> It is obvious that he is in favour of the former. Even though he washes his hands in a very Pilate-like fashion of the crimes committed by his devotees, Julian is nevertheless attracted to the dark undercurrents of Ancient aesthetics – at least in theory: “‘Bloodshed is a terrible thing,’ said Julian hastily – [...] – ‘but the bloodiest parts of Homer and Aeschylus are often the most magnificent [...]’” (*SH*, 40). Taking his cue from Julian’s violently archaic aesthetics, Henry stages a bacchanal, the objective of which is

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<sup>26</sup> Although Dostoevsky was Nietzsche’s senior and did not have access to the latter’s Superman concept, he was opposed to the idea of “God’s death” as already advocated by Nihilists of his day.

<sup>27</sup> Barbara A. Melvin’s article, “Failures in Classical and Modern Morality: Echoes of Euripides in *The Secret History*,” deals with this duality in Tartt’s novel from the point of view of moral psychology.

to enter a trance state, in which consciousness and abstract thought are replaced by the ecstasies of immediate action (“That fire of pure being.”; *SH*, 45). Afterwards, Henry confides in Richard, who by now regards him as a similar authority figure to Julian, only more so, since Henry speaks from actual experience:

‘You saw Dionysus, I suppose?’  
 I had not meant this at all seriously, and I was startled when he nodded as casually as if I’d asked him if he’d done his homework.  
 ‘You saw him *corporeally*? Goatskin? Thyrsus?’  
 ‘How do *you* know what Dionysus is?’ said Henry, a bit sharply. ‘What do you think it was we saw? A cartoon? A drawing from the side of a vase?’ (*SH*, 187; italics in the original)

Henry’s condescending attitude towards Richard recalls a scene from Euripides’s *The Bacchae* (the play is also directly alluded to in the novel; *SH*, 42-43; 204), in which Pentheus sarcastically interrogates Dionysus as to just how the god reveals himself to his celebrants:

PENTHEUS: You say you saw him face to face: what was he like?  
 DIONYSUS: Such as he chose to be. I had no say in that. (p. 207)

Henry resembles the character of Dionysus, in that he too is unwilling to divulge all the inside information of what goes on in a bacchanal, though he lets his listener in on at least a part of the secret he himself appears to embody. Like his ancient counterpart, Henry wants to keep his experience of (ostensible) self-empowerment to himself alone, while at the same time setting himself as a model for others. In accordance with mimetic theory, Henry stirs a desire in his would-be followers that simultaneously encourages and discourages imitation (cf. Girard 2013, 1175).

Henry’s use of ‘Dionysus’ as the supreme existential idol hides other, less ethereal and more prosaic role models, not least his Classics teacher Julian whose theory inspires his practical experiments. There is also something ‘Nietzschean’ in his insistence upon embodying originality even when it is clear that he is under strong influence. Nietzsche also proclaimed that he alone was worthy of assuming the very name of Dionysus, although he was continually pursued by the shadow of his mentor-turned-rival Wagner, who, according to Girard, was Nietzsche’s real-life mediator of desirable being, or ‘will to power’:

The fear that the mediator might still be the “true” Dionysus is the same thing as being deprived of the higher will, the same experience as being overwhelmed, vis-à-vis Richard Wagner, by an irrepressible resentment. (Girard 2013, 1172)

This paranoid pursuit of self-empowerment borders on self-destruction, and it prefigures Henry's suicide in the novel's climax, after his former idol Julian has humiliated and rejected his favourite disciple.

According to Girard, the subject's assertion of autonomy is inseparable from violence, which is regarded as the definitive signifier of God-like omnipotence (Girard 2004, 200). This violence is directed at the Other's being (in *The Secret History*, Henry engineers the murder of his friend, Bunny Corcoran), but it can also turn against the self (Henry commits suicide). In Girard's view, the logic of suicide consists in worshipping one's nothingness (Girard 1976, 275).

A similar description of suicide as the supreme manifestation of autonomy is put forward by Joel Black in his book *The Aesthetics of Murder* (1991). Black discusses the "artistic" logic of suicide through the example of Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler*:

What is so beautiful [...] about blowing one's brains out? Any coroner can readily attest that, far from having any aesthetic appeal, such deaths are the bloodiest, the most gruesome, and the most violent. So why does Hedda find shooting oneself in the head so attractive? [...]. [...] such a violent deed appears as a decisive, irrevocable, and therefore heroic act. [...]. Hedda [...] is determined to make herself mistress of her fate in a definitive, existential act. (Black 1991, 2)

Although Black states that the clinical brutality of a real suicide and "the experience of someone actually witnessing such a spectacle" (1991, 2) have nothing to do with the aesthetic ideal of self-annihilation envisaged by persons such as Ibsen's anti-heroine, he also concludes that the ostensible heroism showcased by the "beautiful" suicide may resonate in another character (whether a fictional or an actual one) "who empathizes or identifies with this person [= the suicid  e] from afar" (1992, 2). Even though in the diegetic world of *The Secret History* Richard really witnesses Henry's self-inflicted gunshot wounds and, moreover, is himself wounded by a stray bullet fired while Henry and Charles wrestle for the gun, his trauma does not seem to affect his aesthetic judgement after the fact. On the contrary, his contemplative faculty is remarkably lucid:

The story at the Albemarle was simple, it told itself, really: suicidal Henry, struggle for the gun, leaving me wounded and him dead. In a way I felt this was unfair to Henry but in another it wasn't. And it made me feel better in some obscure way: imagining myself a hero, rushing fearlessly for the gun, instead of merely loitering in the bullet's path like the bystander which I so essentially am. (*SH*, 612-613)

In Tarrt's novel violence becomes the chief object of rivalry between the model and the imitator. Richard laments his lack of initiative in the moment of crisis and in hindsight feels that his wound would have been heroic had he willingly abandoned himself to the bullet instead of being a passive casualty in a fight that did not directly include him. This is in keeping with Girard's mimetic theory. Jean-Michel Oughourlian, in his interview with Girard, sums up the equation of imitation and bloodshed, when he says that "Each wishes to prevent the other from incarnating the irresistible violence he wishes to incarnate himself" (Girard 1987, 304).<sup>28</sup> In *The Secret History*, Henry's plot to eliminate Bunny presents Richard with the chance to share in the glow of omnipotence emanating from the first murder, one he does not take part in. But just like Raskolnikov in *Crime and Punishment*, Richard is unable to enjoy his transgression once the murder has been committed, and is instead overwhelmed by guilt and a sense of alienation. In Henry's suicide Richard detects a sign of a fundamental difference underlying the personalities of the two men, echoing the barrier between Ancient and Modern thought.<sup>29</sup> Through his suicide, Henry achieves what appears to Richard to be the crowning feat of his life's story; Henry has defined his existence through the very act of ending it. As Sartre has pointed out, one's biography is always a kind of obituary, because death retrospectively gives meaning to life.<sup>30</sup> According to the psychoanalytic critic Peter Brooks, to live is "to die the right death" (Brooks 1992, 107). For Richard, there is no equalling Henry in either *ars vivendi* or *ars moriendi*.

What escapes Richard, – even in his retrospective narrator's viewpoint – is that Henry is not as original an agent as he supposes. Henry's Dionysiac desires are passed on to him by Julian. And although through "putting to use" Julian's "principles," Henry has surpassed his master – who is unwilling to live up to, let alone die for, his teachings. He is also devastated by Julian's refusal of this gift, thus revealing his dependency on the Other. Moreover, through his efforts to appropriate a more 'ancient' identity, Henry tries to escape his own intellectualism – a quality admired by Richard and the others, but one he himself finds tiresome – and silence "the volume of the inner monologue" (*SH*, 39). As he tells the

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<sup>28</sup> Girard himself formulated the equation of desire and violence already in *Violence and the Sacred*: "Whenever the disciple borrows from his model what he believes to be the 'true' object, he tries to possess that truth by desiring precisely what this model desires. Whenever he sees himself closest to the supreme goal, he comes into violent conflict with a rival. By a mental shortcut that is both eminently logical and self-defeating, he convinces himself that the violence itself is the most distinctive attribute of this supreme goal! Ever afterward, violence and desire will be linked in his mind, and the presence of violence will invariably awaken desire" (Girard 2005, 157).

<sup>29</sup> See also Melvin (1996, 60): "Whereas Henry is comforted [...] Richard remains unconsoled by classical philosophy."

<sup>30</sup> Sartre / cit. Brooks (1992, 94-95).

dumbstruck Richard, this end can be achieved only by extreme violence and an annihilation of another living being:

[...] my life, for the most part, has been very stale and colorless. Dead, I mean. The world has always been an empty place to me. I was incapable of enjoying even the simplest things. I felt dead in everything I did.' [...]. 'But then it changed,' he said. 'The night I killed that man.'

I was jarred – a little spooked, as well – at the blatant reference to something referred to, by mutual agreement, almost exclusively with codes, catchwords, a hundred different euphemisms.

'It was the most important night of my life,' he said calmly. 'It enabled me to do what I've always wanted most.'

'Which is?'

'To live without thinking.' (*SH*, 556-557)

Echoing Henry's earlier account to Richard of his having met the Greek god Dionysus face to face, Henry now also appears to possess a secret elevating him to a higher sphere of knowledge. The gnostic hierarchy remains despite Henry's attempts at projecting his transgressive vitality on Richard and highlighting his friend's complicity, not in the first murder, but in the second. Despite the express lack of ecstatic revelry, Bunny's murder is also an act of empowerment, as Richard reluctantly admits after Henry confronts him:

'Now,' he said, 'now I know that I can do anything that I want.' He glanced up. 'And, unless I'm very wrong, you've experienced something similar yourself.'

'I don't know what you're talking about.'

'Oh, but I think you do. That surge of power and delight, of confidence, of control. That sudden sense of the richness of the world. Its infinite possibility.'

He was talking about the ravine. And, to my horror, I realized that in a way he was right. As ghastly as it had been, there was no denying that Bunny's murder had thrown all subsequent events into a kind of glaring Technicolor. And, though this new lucidity of vision was frequently nerve-wracking, there was no denying that it was not an altogether unpleasant sensation. (*SH*, 557)

Moreover, Henry is able to articulate his motive for the killing of the Vermont chicken farmer, whereas Richard cannot come up with a clear reason for his own participation in Bunny's murder. Richard denies his complicity having been a matter of good or evil – or even, on his part, a conscious transgression of these moral categories ('But while I have never considered myself a very good person, neither can I bring myself to believe I am a spectacularly bad one.'; *SH*, 309). If anything, this ethical apathy seems to indicate *amoralism* rather than *immoralism*. Still, alternately, he borders on acute guilt ('Suddenly, and for the first time, really, I was struck by the bitter, irrevocable truth of it; the evil of what

we had done.”; *SH*, 437), and even remorse (“*Bun*, I thought, *oh, Bun, I’m sorry.*”; *SH*, 472; italics in the original).

Richard’s role in the conspiracy against Bunny – made easier by the latter’s ambivalent behaviour and blackmailing ventures – is brought about by his desire to both show support for Henry and share in his charisma; namely, to appreciate the Other’s superiority while simultaneously wanting to *be* the Other. Afterwards, however, it seems that Richard at least is not cut out to be a genuine immoralist, but is merely impressionable and highly suggestible: “[...] chalk it up to weakness on my part, hubris on Henry’s, too much Greek prose composition – whatever you like.”; *SH*, 309). It is noteworthy that Richard identifies himself as one whose character flaw is *weakness*, as opposed to Henry for whom it is *hubris*.

This differentiation between the two men and their respective falls from grace hints at a fundamental hierarchy that assigns the role of super hero (or, indeed, super villain) to Henry, while relegating Richard to one of the faithful servant or ‘side-kick.’ However, the hierarchy is established by Richard’s narrative perspective, itself prone to false modesty and masochistic resentment. Moreover, a heroic design still lingers in Richard’s own self. Notice, for instance, that while reading *The Great Gatsby*, he identifies with the tragic greatness of the eponymous character, and not the side-kick Nick Carraway with whom he shares the voyeuristic tendency of ecstatically contemplating the comings and goings of a friend supposedly more heroic than himself. Like Raskolnikov in Girard’s analysis, Richard “does not know whether his solitude makes him superior or inferior to other humans, an individual god or an individual earthworm” (Girard 1997, 71). What is clear to Tarrt’s implied reader, is that both Richard and Henry are infected by a Romanticism gone awry; both have been deafened by what John Gardner would call “the din of individualist, anti-rational philosophies like Nietzsche’s, wherein intuition serves not compassion and understanding but ferocious self-assertion, the Romantic hero as snarling Superman [...]” (Gardner 1978, 38).

The flippancy evident in Richard’s narrative tone further indicates that he may either be “underreading” his own past motivations and in fact bears a heavier burden of a conscious moral decision than he is willing to admit to himself, or that he may be “underreporting” these motivations in the face of his narratee.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> For the definitions of “underreading” and “underreporting”, see Phelan’s analysis of Kazuo Ishiguro’s *The Remains of the Day* (1990) and its I-narrator, Stevens: “By ‘underreporting,’ I mean that Stevens does not admit to his narratee what both he and the authorial audience know about his personal interest. If he is underreporting, the unreliability does exist along the axis of ethics: Stevens is being intentionally deceptive. By ‘underreading,’ I mean that he does not consciously know—or at least is not able to admit to himself—what we infer about his personal interest. If he is underreading, then the unreliability exists along neither the axis of ethics nor the axis of events but along a different axis, one that Booth’s work and its various supplements have not sufficiently

All the same, Richard is at times compelled to divulge his motivation – or lack thereof – to the narratee. At these moments he approaches a ‘novelistic’ unmasking of his ‘Romantic’ deception à la Girard:

I would like to say I was driven to what I did by some overwhelming, tragic motive. But I think I would be lying if I told you that; if I led you to believe that on that Sunday afternoon in April, I was actually being driven by anything of the sort. (*SH*, 254)

Richard’s apparent lack of motivation is actually itself an indication of one; the “impetus” (ibid.) to kill Bunny was to identify with Bunny’s enemies, the Greek group that had its own ‘Romantic lies’ threatened by a potential informer.

A similarly ambivalent relationship between the self and the Other lies at the heart of Muriel Spark’s *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, in which the long past “prime” of the titular schoolmistress still haunts her former pupil Sandy Stranger whose relationship with her childhood mentor is very much a love-hate relationship. Like Nietzsche’s Zarathustra, Miss Brodie – while she still *is* in her eponymous prime and employed at the Marcia Blaine School for Girls in 1930’s Edinburgh – looks forward to a more individualistic age of education,<sup>32</sup> and vehemently sets herself apart from her more conventional and collectively oriented colleagues, especially the headmistress Miss Mackay, who advocates a “team spirit” to be shared by the whole school. Miss Brodie’s “progressive” educational programme, with its “subjects irrelevant to the authorized curriculum” (*PMJB*, 5) consists in the teacher merely “leading out” the superlative qualities already present in the students themselves. At the same time, though, she flaunts her “prime” as a woman and a teacher, and in so doing reflects the achievements of her pupils (Monica Douglas’s mathematical aptitude, Jenny Gray’s beauty coupled with voice and performance skills, Eunice Gardiner’s athleticism and Rose Stanley’s sex appeal) back to herself (“[...] ‘and all my pupils are the crème de la crème.’”; *PMJB*, 8).

Ruth Whittaker describes *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* as an “analy[i]s of the temptation to play God in a world where his absence leaves a dangerous void” (Whittaker 1984, 106). Whittaker is quick to point out that Miss Brodie’s “Messianic complex” (ibid.) is not a declaration of Nietzschean atheism, since the only Christian denomination Miss Brodie

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noticed: the axis of knowledge and perception” (Phelan 2005, 34). In a footnote following this excerpt, Phelan mentions William F. Riggan’s *Picaros, Madmen, Naifs, and Clowns: The Unreliable First-Person Narrator* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1981) and Mary Elizabeth Preston’s “Homodiegetic Narration: Reliability, Selfconsciousness, Ideology, and Ethics” (Ph.D dissertation, Ohio State University, 1997) as positive exceptions among the narratologists studying the axis of knowledge and perception.

<sup>32</sup> The heroic sage of *Thus Spake Zarathustra* does not yet himself possess the *Übermensch* qualities, but is merely a messenger of things to come (“Lo, I teach you the Superman!”; p. 6).

shuns is Roman Catholicism (ibid.); in some ways, at least, Miss Brodie is actually quite properly Calvinistic to suit her Scottish roots. Her hubris is more of a matter of thinking God is on her side and against her enemies, not so much a rejection of God. Therefore, her stance is only indirectly immoralist, since she thinks herself – and only herself – to be moral.

The elitist aura surrounding Miss Brodie blinds those girls “at an impressionable age” who hope to aspire to it. The hero-worship the teacher ignites in a pupil not included in the original “Brodie set,” Joyce Emily Hammond – a “delinquent” in the eyes of the other girls (*PMJB*, 8) – causes the latter to volunteer to fight on Franco’s side in the Spanish Civil War and be killed while on her way to the battlefield.

As is the case in Tarrt’s *The Secret History*, also in Spark’s *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, the idea of asserting oneself through violence is passed on from the ‘master’ to the ‘disciple.’ Equating individual autonomy with killing or being killed – the characters of Henry and Joyce Emily respectively commit (or seek to commit) violence against others *and* sacrifice their own lives – is related to an archaic and somewhat romantic ideal of heroism. For Girard, the fallacy at the heart of mimetic desire is the urge to completely ignore any element of interdependence between the self and the Other. In fiction, this individualism finds expression, for example, in a Romantic cult emphasising narrative motifs like chivalric wars, mystical quests and heroic martyrdom (one of Girard’s examples of a novel that successfully unmasks this “Romantic lie”<sup>33</sup> is *Don Quixote*). But this self-worship is inseparable from the worship of others, since everything is learned through imitation, even autonomy. In his anthropological (rather than theological) analysis of Biblical texts, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning* (1999, English translation in 2001), Girard describes this “double idolatry of self and other”: “When we are devoted to adoring our neighbour, this adoration can easily turn to hatred because we seek desperately to adore ourselves [...]” (Girard 2001, 11). Likewise, in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, the cult of the warrior adopted by Joyce Emily ends in predictable tragedy, both for herself and for her adored Other.

The outsider Joyce Emily’s fate is foreshadowed by Miss Brodie’s frequent recitals to her “set” of pupils of her role models who are decidedly heroic and warrior-like ones (Mary, Queen of Scots, for instance, as well as the contemporary right-wing dictators of continental Europe). These romantic aspirations are echoed by Sandy in the identifications of her own choice (she has imaginary conversations with the character of Alan Breck from *Kidnapped*;

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<sup>33</sup> The original French title of Girard’s *Deceit, Desire and the Novel* is *Mensonge romantique et vérité romanesque* (literally: “The Romantic Lie and the Novelistic Truth”).



*PMJB*, 28-30. The same Stevenson novel is mentioned by Francis in *The Secret History*, only he identifies with Davy Balfour; *SH*, 493).

According to Kenneth A. Bruffee, it is typical of a certain kind of novel – what he calls the “elegiac romance” – to focus on a relationship between two characters, a seemingly heroic figure and his more mundane and prosaic companion who, at least initially, settles for observing the hero’s actions and singing his praises. Whereas the ‘observer’ is a definite product of contemporary culture and values, the ‘hero’ appears to be a messenger from a more archaic and fairy-tale like age: “It is significant in this regard that a number of observer-hero narratives play upon the old-fashionedness of the hero in contrast to the up-to-date observer” (Buell 1979 / cit. Bruffee 1983, 27<sup>34</sup>). Although Bruffee’s own genre definition, the elegiac romance, differs from Buell’s broader category of “observer-hero narrative” in that it bridges the distance between the hero and the narrator (a bridging that Girard would no doubt call mimetic desire becoming increasingly internalized), the narrator continues to endow his hero with romantic and princely attributes, even while “internaliz[ing] the hero’s madness”<sup>35</sup> (Bruffee 1983, 39). In Bruffee’s view, the narrator-protagonist of elegiac romances is often attached to outworn aesthetic conventions and perspectives; Bruffee mentions “boys’ adventure fiction,” “cheap romantic fiction” and “the courtly love tradition” (Bruffee 1983, 135) as examples of these kinds of anachronistic trappings from which the narrator struggles to free himself, and they comply very well with similar observations by Girard: the empty prestige of aristocratic titles in Proust, or the fetishizing of a seemingly more glorious and authentic past in Stendhal. This schism between the contemporary and the ‘classic’ (or ‘romantic,’ or anything directly opposed to the ‘modern’) is painfully obvious in the contrast between Henry and Richard in *The Secret History*. But, as we saw earlier, the supposedly fundamental difference between the characters is at heart a fallacy, and the two men are very likely more similar with each other than they care to admit. This “secret” of fundamental sameness and interdependence (cf. Girard 1976, 298) could very well be regarded as one of the driving forces of Tartt’s text. Similarly, in the Spark novel, Sandy, even while recognizing

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<sup>34</sup> Buell, Lawrence. 1979. “Observer-Hero Narrative.” In *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 21 (Spring, 1979). Pp. 93-111. The loosely generic category of “observer-hero narrative” was first invented by Buell, whom Bruffee here quotes and references. In Bruffee’s opinion, his own genre formulation, the elegiac romance, is a particular sub-category of the observer-hero narrative (Bruffee 1983, 26-31).

<sup>35</sup> While describing the narrator as a kind of squire who over-zealously identifies with his hero’s knightly quest, Bruffee uses the relationship of Sancho Panza to Don Quixote as an archetypal precedent to twentieth-century elegiac romances (Bruffee 1983, 39). This way, Bruffee comes close to Girard, who sees Cervantes as an important incidence of ‘novelistic truth,’ although later writers such as Stendhal, Proust and Dostoevsky were more ‘internal’ in their mimetic desire and therefore put their characters through an even more intense purgatory in order to repudiate their model’s false divinity.

Miss Brodie's irrational emulation of Mussolini, continues to look up to her as a model of self-reliance, whether in the capacity of 'master' or rival. This means she either explicitly imitates Miss Brodie's desires (as a child, for example, she plays at Miss Brodie's favourite actress, Sybil Thorndike; *PMJB*, 23) or sets out to deliberately contradict her teachings (converting to Catholicism, a religious persuasion openly scorned by Miss Brodie). Either way, Sandy is caught up in the other woman's desires, whether paralleling or contrasting them.

For Girard, mimetic desire entails the fundamental paradox of a subject asserting his selfhood by way of imitating the Other in whom he sees a model of autonomy (Girard 1976, 272). But, for the benefit of individualistic doctrine, this imitative identity project must be kept a secret from others, including one's self. In turn, the subject sets himself as a model Superman for everyone else. The hidden machinations of this mimetic mechanism result in everybody's imitation of everybody. (Girard 2004, 197).

In *Violence and the Sacred*, Girard writes extensively on *The Bacchae* and the character of Dionysus. He vehemently opposes Nietzsche, for whom the Greek god is a noble transgressor of Judeo-Christian dualities of good and evil<sup>36</sup> that were devised to repress man's free spirit.<sup>37</sup> In Girard's opinion, Euripides's Dionysus is, on the contrary, "a Satanic seducer" and "the god of mob hysteria" (Girard 2005, 132-133). For Girard, there is no distinction in violent crime, but a terrifying likeness between those who take part in bloodshed and lynching. Transgression, far from being the opposite of imitation, *is*, in fact, imitation. The unglamorous result of Henry's immoralism and the ugly reality of Julian's credo, "'Beauty is terror'" (*SH*, 41), are momentarily revealed to Richard when he glances at a newspaper item reporting the farmer's murder ("[...] – the word *mutilated* had electrified me, it was the only thing I could see on the page – [...]."; *SH*, 350).

Because in the Western paradigm of "transgressive fiction," the object of rebellion is usually Christianity, the model transgressors often share Satanic traits, or denounce divinity altogether, espousing an atheism of sorts. This theme of man's rebellion against God is very popular with Dostoevsky. The master / disciple interaction of Julian and Henry in *The Secret History* recalls a similar relationship between Ivan and Smerdyakov in *The Brothers*

<sup>36</sup> On the question of Dionysus transcending good and evil, see also E.R. Dodds's introduction to Euripides's *Bacchae* (Dodds 1944, xlii). In *The Secret History* Tartt quotes another work by Dodds (*The Greeks and the Irrational*, 1951), dealing with the characteristics of Dionysianism.

<sup>37</sup> In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche writes: "From the start, the Christian faith is a sacrifice: a sacrifice of all freedom, all pride, all self-confidence of the spirit; at the same time, enslavement and self-mockery, self-mutilation" (p. 60). In *Zarathustra*, again, the main character famously denounces the duality of moral opposites and seeks to transcend them: "How weary I am of my good and my bad! It is all poverty and pollution and wretched self-complacency!" (p. 7).

*Karamazov*; both Smerdyakov and Henry set out to transcend conventional moral categories, but they do this at the behest of a moral – or immoral – authority figure, who is human, yet somehow appears to be divine – or Satanic.

The spirit of mimetic violence – very ‘Dionysiac’ in character – is linked with a desire to become God-like in one’s self-reliance (something Girard calls an “ontological sickness”; Girard 1976, 96). But the paradox remains: how to measure one’s autonomy without comparing the self with the Other?

Often the immoralist temptation is itself inseparable from mimetic desire and the fascination with the Other’s example. In his study of dyadic character relationships in novels he describes as “elegiac romances,” namely narratives that contemplate and then repudiate the main character’s hero-worship of another character, Bruffee analyzes a meaningful quote from Ford Madox Ford’s *The Good Soldier* (1915) in which the narrator John Dowell describes his relationship with Edward Ashburnham in a fashion suggestive of voyeuristic complicity as a “large elder brother who took me out on several excursions and did many dashing things whilst I just watched him robbing the orchards from a distance” (p. 291, cf. Bruffee 1983, 194<sup>38</sup>). The image of the “orchard” summons up, not only the archetypal transgressive motif of the forbidden fruit in “Genesis,” but also St. Augustine’s contemplation in *Confessions* (p. 29) of gratuitous evil as evident in his recollection of having stolen pears with other boys merely for the thrill of the crime and not for sustenance.<sup>39</sup>

Although Ian McEwan’s *Amsterdam* presents the two protagonists, Clive Linley and Vernon Halliday as symmetrical equals, with neither man cast in the role of “elder brother,” it is noteworthy, that the Biblical orchard motif is still in evidence in the novel. When reminiscing about their shared love interest, the newly deceased Molly Lane, Clive remembers with express vividness a 1978 Christmas party at which Molly and her then-boyfriend played Adam and Eve in an erotically risqué tableaux (“he in his Y-fronts, she in bra and panties”; *A*, 7) that had a snooker table stand in for the garden, a cue for the snake and a red ball for the fruit. What is especially titillating for Clive, though, is the fact that while performing as Eve, Molly initiates eye-contact with him and not her Adam:

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<sup>38</sup> The edition of *The Good Soldier* used by Bruffee has the quote on pages 253-254.

<sup>39</sup> Both of these “orchard” transgressions of course involve imitation and influence: In “Genesis,” the Serpent tempts Eve who then tempts a very willing Adam. The mimetic aspect of the forbidden fruit – as opposed to a popular emphasis on sexuality – is further analyzed by Girard (e.g., 2004, 324-325) and Oughourlian (2010, 43-80), among others. Commenting on St. Augustine’s pear-thieving episode in *Confessions*, Andrew Delbanco, who makes no reference to mimetic theory, has also made the connection between transgression and imitative desire when he detects a similar “[shame] [of not being] shameless” in contemporary juvenile delinquency (Delbanco 1996, 12).

She had looked right at him when she pretended to bite the apple, and smiled raunchily through her chomping, with one hand on a jutting hip, like a music hall parody of a tart. He thought it was a signal, the way she held his gaze, and sure enough, they were back together that April. (*A*, 7)

Clive and Molly's relationship is an on-and-off affair, though, and the narrator proceeds with recounting Vernon's very similar memories of his time with her. Not superfluously, the phrase used by the narrator (Vernon taking the proverbial "bite" of the apple) deliberately echoes Clive's Edenic association of Molly: "In the mid-eighties Vernon too had had a second bite, on holiday on an estate in Umbria. Then he was Rome correspondent for the paper he now edited, and a married man" (*A*, 8).

The amorous recollections of the two men are almost identical with each other. In both cases, they were resuming an affair with Molly after a first break-up; in both cases, the affair was at least partly an illicit one, with Clive and Molly reconnecting while Molly was dating another man, and Vernon carrying on with Molly behind his wife's back.

Interestingly, the orchard motif does not fade out with these erotic parallels between Clive and Vernon, but surfaces later in connection to their mutual relationship and the eventual souring thereof. A successful composer, Clive has, among other things, set Blake's poem, "A Poison Tree" (1794), to music (*A*, 152). The poem famously explores the thin but all-important line between friendship and enmity, and the fatality of hiding resentment from the other party as opposed to openly acknowledging it:

I was angry with my friend;  
I told my wrath, my wrath did end.  
I was angry with my foe:  
I told it not, my wrath did grow. (Blake 1988, 28)

The citing of "A Poison Tree" comes at a moment when Clive's feud with Vernon has reached fever pitch. Vernon has made a complaint to the police about Clive's failure to report the attempted rape he witnessed in the Lake District, and this vengeful maneuver results in Clive being called away from his London home to identify the rapist from a Manchester police station line-up; it is actually a "Chief Inspector [...] working for an English degree at the Open University" who has "a special interest in Blake" (*A*, 151) who prompts Clive to reveal his past preoccupation with (and present enactment of) Blake's theme of fearful symmetry. The poem, not cited in the novel, proceeds with a murder that is not tantamount to

mutual destruction, although it is facilitated by the victim's reciprocated fascination with his murderer:

And I waterd it in fears,  
Night & morning with my tears:  
And I sunned it with smiles,  
And with soft deceitful wiles.

And it grew both day and night.  
Till it bore an apple bright.  
And my foe beheld it shine,  
And he knew that it was mine.

And into my garden stole,  
When the night had veild the pole;  
In the morning glad I see;  
My foe outstretchd beneath the tree. (Blake 1988, 28)

Blake's verses are of course identical with the ethos of McEwan's characters. Clive and Vernon, once they strike up a false truce in the Amsterdam concert hall ("Let's shake on it then. Friends.' 'Friends.'"; *A*, 165) reciprocally hide their "wrath" from each other and, like Blake's lyric narrator, they dissimulate their resentment "with soft deceitful wiles" (Blake 1988, 28). McEwan's end result is the same as Blake's, only more so: instead of just one "foe outstretchd beneath the tree," there are two victims, both of whom have succumbed to their respective "apple[s] bright" born out of their venomous cultivation of clandestine "fears" of the Other (Blake 1988, 28).

At this point of pending mutual destruction, Molly, who has indirectly initiated the conflict, has ceased to be an important incentive to it. True, her legacy is summoned from the grave to serve as referee between her two lovers who each blame the other for betraying her unvoiced wishes. But very soon she fades into the background and it is the friendship of the two men that is raised to the fore.

The paradoxical nature of the mimetic situation, with sameness causing an illusion of difference, is summed up in *Amsterdam*, where Clive, full of resentment towards Vernon after the two men have had their fatal argument over whether or not to go public with the scandalous photographs of the Foreign Secretary, contemplates his own professional integrity as opposed to his friend's: "There would come a time when nothing would remain of Vernon Halliday, but what would remain of Clive Linley would be his music" (*A*, 138). Clive sees his composition as "a kind of revenge" (*A*, 139) to Vernon and is unable to measure his own success without thinking about the possibility of Vernon's failure. Where Clive has earlier

appraised his work *positively* by comparing himself with the great men of his profession, after falling out with his friend, he makes a *negative* comparison between himself and Vernon, who, after all, is not a composer but a journalist. That a personal symmetry coincides with a professional asymmetry becomes evident in Clive's musings during his meditative hike which directly link the block in the creative process of writing music with the disruption in the friendship with Vernon: "As he walked along, he thought about Vernon, and the symphony. Was the work ruined, or simply flawed?" (A, 155). The conflict is thus completely personalized and it no longer has any meaning in a given professional or social context; from here on, there is no Purcell or Britten – at least not in any specific cultural or historical terms – but only Vernon.

In *Amsterdam*, Clive and Vernon are constantly preoccupied with self-definition which they discover to be inseparable from invidious comparison with the Other; the subject is only as good as the rival is bad, or even downright evil. Clive, a leading composer in the British and international music scene, is in what should be the final stage of writing a symphony to commemorate the turn of the millennium, and regarding the work in progress as a kind of magnum opus and a crowning achievement of his thus far illustrious career, cannot help contemplating his legacy and defending his vision:

Even his supporters, at least in the '70s, granted the term 'arch-conservative', while his critics preferred 'throwback', but all agreed that along Schubert and McCartney, Linley could write a melody.[...]. He regarded himself as Vaughan Williams' heir [...]. (A, 21)

Clive relishes his earlier successes and the fact that he can measure up to such luminaries as Schubert, Vaughan Williams and Paul McCartney. It hardly matters whether such superlative parallels are drawn by other people or by himself, since definition is impossible without comparison. Comparisons with other famous composers also function reversely to blacken Clive's reputation, as is apparent when his arch nemesis, the music critic Paul Lanark, who has first characterized Clive as "the thinking man's Gorecki," later "recants" and calls Gorecki "the thinking man's Linley." This reversal from one opposite to the other is in keeping with the oscillating quality of mimetic "attraction-repulsion" that can instantaneously transform admiration into resentment (Girard 2010, 31). Finally, Clive goes as far as to juxtapose himself with the greatest master of them all, modelling a melody of his symphony after "Ode to Joy" ("Such was the exalted nature of his mission, and of his ambition. Beethoven."; A, 76).

This act of artistic hubris is linked with violence: firstly, when Clive ignores a rape victim's pleas for help in the Lake District holiday resort because he prefers to focus on his composition, and secondly, when he engineers Vernon's death by a rogue euthanasia without knowing that Vernon has devised an identical murder plot for Clive's benefit. The double murder has repercussions on Clive's musical legacy as well, since posterity links his death with his imitation of Beethoven, which is viewed as a blatant act of plagiarism by the musical community, thus exposing to the world Clive's hidden mimetic desire. Clive has thus fallen into a similar trap than has Sandy Stranger in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*; he has imitated his mentor too well, entangling himself in a Batesonian double bind *par excellence*.

The failure of Clive's pursuit of autonomy is discussed by Foreign Secretary Julian Garmony and George Lane (both men are actually Clive's rivals – and Vernon's too –, Garmony as a former lover and George as the widowed husband of Molly Lane whose death has ignited the fatal feud between Clive and Vernon who both loved her):

Because they hadn't spoken for rather a long while, George said airily, 'I hear the Birmingham première has been postponed.'

'Cancelled actually. Giulio Bo says it's a dud. Half the BSO refuse to play it. Apparently there's a tune at the end, shameless copy of Beethoven's Ode to Joy, give or take a note or two.'

'No wonder he killed himself.' (*A*, 176)

The irony of the dialogue between Garmony and George is that it condones Clive's apparent self-annihilation (the double murder is mistaken for a suicide pact), since to live with the shame of plagiarism is considered to be a fate worse than death. Suicide at least restores some sense of autonomy to the unfortunate imitator.

### 3.2 Partners in Crime, Brothers at War

If Girard is correct in saying that experiencing God-like self-sufficiency and a sense of omnipotence is inseparable from violence (Girard 2004, 200; 1987, 304), then it must also follow that once the transgressive act – namely a crime of some degree – has been committed, all evidence of possible *complicity* must be repressed, as this would suggest the self having been influenced by the Other. Still, the secret knowledge of an ambivalent partnership in crime has a way of surfacing after the fact. This is also the case in *The Secret History*, where Richard realizes that Henry has used him as a pawn in a larger scheme. And what is worse, he himself made this manipulation easy:

He had appealed to my vanity, allowing me to think I'd figured it out by myself (*good for you*, he'd said, leaning back in his chair; I could still remember the look on his face as he'd said it, *good for you, you're just as smart as I'd thought you were*); and I had congratulated myself in the glow of his praise [...]. [...] – oh, God, I thought, my God, how could I have listened to him? [...]. Less than twenty-four hours later, Bunny was dead. And though I hadn't done the actual pushing – which had seemed an essential distinction at the time – now that didn't matter much anymore. (*SH*, 550-551; italics in the original)

While seeking divine autonomy, Richard has in fact succumbed to an all too human Messiah, one in relation to whom there is no “essential distinction.” As was noted earlier in chapter 3.1., the supposedly spontaneous and daredevil transgression of conventional values, if motivated by imitation of these ‘transgressive’ qualities, becomes conventional in itself. Like all objects of metaphysical desire, the supposedly transcendental status of existence is “merely a phantom that will invariably escape man’s grasp” (Girard 2005, 143). All that is to be gained by rivalry, is rivalry itself. The only prize to be won by Richard through his murder of Bunny, is his complicity with Henry in the transgressive act of murder. Even the halo of this later transgression is snatched away from Richard, for it was hardly ‘original’ or ‘autonomous,’ but dictated by Henry’s master plan.

But it is not just Richard in his capacity as disciple who is ambivalent in his feelings towards his master, Henry. The same is true of Julian and Henry’s initially hierarchical relationship in which Henry for once plays the role of disciple. Once he learns the truth of the murders, Julian is disgusted by the lengths Henry has gone to in his pursuit of the Greek ideal supposedly shared by teacher and student alike. But Julian’s reaction is not one of moral consternation (Richard describes him as “a moral neutral”; *SH*, 574); he does not inform on his students or question their world view. Julian’s confrontation with Henry has more to do with psychological humiliation, as he forces the usually cool and articulate Henry to explain himself like a badly behaved child:

Henry started to talk. It was so painful to hear him – Henry! – stumble over his words that I am afraid I blocked out much of what he said. He began, in typical fashion, by attempting to justify himself but that soon faltered in the white glare of Julian’s silence. Then – I still shudder to remember it – a desperate, pleading note crept into his voice. [...]. He went on and on. Julian’s silence was vast, arctic. (*SH*, 574)

In addition to the already mentioned similarity between the pair of Julian and Henry to that of Ivan Karamazov and Smerdyakov, the mimetic hierarchy-turned-symmetry between



the professor and his student in Tartt's novel also resembles a certain Shakespearean king-servant dynamic, as analyzed by Sandor Goodhart in his reading of *Richard II*; having carried out the assassination of the deposed king of the play's title, Exton, knight to the usurper of Richard's throne, Bolingbroke, thinks he has acted according to the present king's wishes. However, Exton is rebuked by Bolingbroke: "Exton, I thank thee not, for thou has wrought/A deed of slander with thy fatal hand/Upon my head and all this famous land" (Act V, scene vi, p.384). Unlike Exton, whose protest is marked for the record ("From your own mouth, my lord, did I this deed"; *ibid.*), Henry's exact words of defence before Julian are not conveyed to the reader (since the novel's narrator Richard has "blocked" them "out"). The master-servant relationship is, however, similar in both Shakespeare and Tartt, as both Exton and Henry, respectively, have acted according to the mixed messages sent by Bolingbroke and Julian, respectively. In his partly Girard-influenced reading of Shakespeare, Goodhart proposes that Bolingbroke's hypocritical condemnation of Exton's overt violence is motivated by its embarrassing closeness to Richard II having during his reign influenced Mowbray's killing of the Duke of Gloucester (Goodhart 1996, 83). In *The Secret History*, Julian, in his "vast, arctic" "silence," does not say as much, but he has implicitly given cause to his own Exton, by flaunting his Dionysiac and transgressive desire in front of his prize student. Also, the reason for Richard's "painful" forgetfulness with regard to Henry's justification of his crime may very well be his own mimetic embarrassment; in agreeing to participate in Bunny's murder, has he not acted Exton to Henry's Bolingbroke?

Bearing in mind the Dostoevskyan and Shakespearean motifs of an authoritative model shunning responsibility for the actions of his imitator, it is not just the overbearing authority of the model, then, but also the embarrassing adulation of the disciple that can cause strife between the two. A teacher's ambivalence towards an all too apt pupil likewise underlies the interaction between Miss Brodie and Sandy in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* in which the teacher warns the pupil of "going too far" (*PMJB*, 23) in her eagerness to imitate the various models thrust before her – even though the thrusting is done by Miss Brodie herself who is always happy to advertise her own idols for her pupils. In *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, Miss Brodie's rebuttal of Sandy ignites the decisive spark of the pupil's resentment and rebellion towards her teacher spanning many years, whereas in *The Secret History*, it only takes a few minutes to crush the attachment thus far shared by Julian and Henry and send the latter to suicidal despair; like Kirillov in Dostoevsky's *The Possessed*, Henry "is hurled from the summit of pride into the abyss of shame" (Girard 1976, 277).

Girard states that, in mimetic desire, the model's rejection of the imitator only exacerbates imitation, "for the mediator's apparent hostility does not diminish his prestige but instead augments it" (Girard 1976, 10). This "prestige" completely lacks real substance. It is not a concrete object or a definable state of affairs, but desire for the sake of desire (Girard 1987, 305). The imitator sees in his own failures to equal the model a reflection of the model's supposedly objective superiority – and wants to imitate him more fervently than ever, building up obstacle after obstacle on his own path to ever-elusive fulfilment (Girard 1987, 328).

In Spark's novel, Sandy's efforts to secure for herself an autonomous selfhood, a virgin soil not yet contaminated by Miss Brodie's presence, put her in a 'Catch-22' situation, in which she either slavishly complies with or diametrically opposes her mentor's conscious or unconscious wishes, in neither case finding her own direction – or rather, recognizing the inescapable fact of imitation in some shape or form. For example, Sandy's conversion to Catholicism could very well be motivated by Miss Brodie's fiercely anti-Catholic rhetoric. Ironically, Miss Brodie's reason for disliking Catholics is what she perceives as their lack of individuality and originality ("[...] only people who did not want to think for themselves were Roman Catholics."; *PMJB*, 85). However, it is hinted that Miss Brodie is herself secretly drawn to the very religion she publicly despises (cf. Bold 1984, 14). All her idols, at least, somehow have a Catholic connection, whether artistically (Dante and Giotto), politically (Mussolini, Franco and Hitler), nationalistically (the Catholic Mary Stuart as opposed to the Calvinist John Knox) or erotically (her coveted colleague, the art master Mr Lloyd as opposed to his Protestant surrogate, the singing master Mr Lowther). As is the case in *The Secret History*, also in Spark's novel the disciple is imitating the model's imitation. This remains to be the case, even after the model has been transformed through hatred and turned into an "anti-model," and the imitator would want nothing more than to re-establish the differences between the self and the Other (cf. Girard 1987, 300).

When Sandy finally manages to strike the decisive blow against Miss Brodie – by informing on what role the latter played in Joyce Emily's death – she acquires yet another accomplice and doppelganger in the headmistress Miss Mackay – a Caiaphas to Sandy's Judas – who harbours a resentment towards Miss Brodie chronologically preceding that of Sandy. Moreover, Sandy is unable to escape the long shadow of her martyred former mentor and remains friends with her even after the transgressive betrayal, never revealing to Miss Brodie the role she played in her downfall.

The more the mimetic rivalry intensifies, the less there remain differentiating features between the model and the imitator, as the model in turn imitates his or her “disciple.” What used to be a hierarchical relationship, is now a mutually blinding mirror image.

Nowhere is the symmetry more fearful than in McEwan’s *Amsterdam*, a novel that displays no discernible hierarchies between characters at all. *Amsterdam* begins with a critical phase in the history of a friendship and ends with a destructive enmity having replaced that friendship, leaving two dead corpses on the scene where the tragedy, albeit a highly ironical and darkly comical one, was played out. McEwan’s novel actually realizes an equivalent to Girard’s remark about Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar* (a work which, incidentally, is explicitly used as an intertext in *Amsterdam*): “Tragedy begins where comedy leaves off, at the point where mimetic rivalry turns lethal” (Girard 2004, 187).

Like any tragedy, *Amsterdam* also concerns characters succumbed to hubris. Moreover, the novel employs another favourite motif of ancient mythology, namely *the brotherly feud*. Initially, Clive Linley and Vernon Halliday’s past sharing of Molly Lane as a love interest does not alter the fact that the two remain great friends. The grief over Molly’s premature demise only strengthens their mutual affection. Both men experience anxiety at the possibility of a painful and lingering death such as hers was, and they make a pact according to which one will help the other die with dignity, depending on whose turn comes first. But once the melancholy surrounding Molly’s funeral is lifted, Clive and Vernon forget their preoccupation with mortality for the time being and resume their work with renewed ambition, before, that is, both men come to make the gravest mistakes of their respective careers.

The catalyst for Clive and Vernon’s fatal transgressions is delivered by Molly’s widower George who approaches Vernon with photographs taken by Molly of yet “another key male” (A, 5), Foreign Secretary Julian Garmony. These pictures, which Molly meant to keep private but was unable to destroy because of her rapidly progressing illness, reveal Garmony to be a transvestite. Vernon is more than tempted to scandalize the right-winger Garmony, but for reasons personal – getting even with a sexual rival and furthering his journalistic career – rather than political. Since Clive is equally contemptuous of Garmony – during Molly’s cremation ceremony, he does his best to embarrass the politician in front of the press (A, 15-16) – Vernon is surprised to meet his friend’s resistance, as Clive thinks going public with the photographs would be hitting the “enemy” (A, 13) below the belt. The argument reaches its peak with Clive blaming Vernon for being an accomplice to the jealous George – in Girardian terms, imitating the other man’s desires – and for betraying Molly’s memory (A, 74-75) – again, in Girardian terms, being unfit to hold the ‘object’ desired by both men.

Feeling morally superior to Vernon, Clive embarks on a hiking holiday to the Lake District, ostensibly in order to find Wordsworthian inspiration to complete a symphony commissioned to celebrate the turn of the millennium that is to have its grand rehearsal in Amsterdam. But Clive also admits to another agenda for his “northward journey,” namely “the long and studied redefinition of a friendship” (A, 66). While communing with nature and playing over an unfinished melody in his head, he witnesses an incident between a woman hiker and an aggressively behaved man. What Clive tells himself could very well be a marital argument is afterwards revealed to have been an attempted rape. Though shaken by this belated piece of information, Clive had already at the time decided not to intervene, even when it meant prolonging the woman’s suffering. What really matters to him is to be left alone and create his art:

[...] – violence, or the threat of violence, or his embarrassed apologies, or, ultimately, a statement to the police – if he had approached the couple, a pivotal moment in his career would have been destroyed. The melody could not have survived the psychic flurry. Given the width of the ridge and the numerous paths that crossed it, how easily he could have missed them. It was as if he wasn’t there. He wasn’t there. He was in his music. His fate, their fate, separate paths. It was not his business. This was his business, and it wasn’t easy, and he wasn’t asking for anyone’s help. (A, 88-89)

Clive’s moral transgression takes the form of neglect. His is not a premeditated ‘crime’ like Sandy’s betrayal of Miss Brodie in Spark’s *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, or an act of destructive frenzy like the killing of the chicken farmer in Tartt’s *The Secret History*. Still, there is arrogance in the way he dismisses the two strangers as not only separate from his “fate” but also inferior to it. He even goes as far in distancing himself from the violation taking place in front of his eyes as to compare it to a “tableau” staged “for his benefit alone” (A, 85). He therefore externalizes the prospect of violence as something taking place between the victim and her assailant, but it does not occur to him – or to his process of rationalization – that his passivity is also a form of violence. Notice how Clive claims to need no help even though *he* is not the one being attacked. Invulnerability and self-sufficiency are suddenly made out to be virtues of the highest kind, although it has not been long since Clive defended the principles of empathy and solidarity in his dispute with Vernon. Clive’s toughness is made all the more ironic in that he – like all central characters of *Amsterdam* – belongs to the baby boomer generation supposedly espousing soft and hippie values. Also, by refusing to intervene in the attempted assault, Clive has made it possible for the rapist to strike again later, this time successfully realizing his goal. Through his inertia coupled with a hint of

voyeurism, he has become a partner in the other man's crime (in this sense, at least, Vernon who has his own reasons for laying blame on his friend-turned-enemy, is right when he calls Clive "an accessory to attempted rape"; *A*, 119).

In accordance with mimetic theory, both main characters of McEwan's novel regard violence as a fetish signifying superiority. Vernon does this through his scapegoating fantasies of Garmony's downfall ("[...] it was like seeing someone you know stripped in public and flogged."; *A*, 116), Clive through his moral lethargy which he megalomaniacally justifies by appealing to his artistic calling. With such obvious parallels between the two, it comes as no surprise that the friends begin to mirror each other's desires and, thus blinded, become sworn enemies. Clive's passive act of violence is followed by an active one when he engineers Vernon's death by an "euthanasia" that is to be carried out by a rogue doctor operating in Amsterdam (the Dutch "medical scandal" is actually being investigated by Vernon's paper; *A*, 36-37; 177). What Clive does not know is that Vernon has devised an identical plan of retribution, no longer settling for vicarious "flogging" of the enemy.

The epigraph chosen by McEwan for his novel emphasises the symmetry between the two main characters. It is a verse from W. H. Auden's poem "The Crossroads": "The friends who met here and embraced are gone, Each to his own mistake;". Clive and Vernon each make a different mistake, but the fact that both come to make similarly grave errors creates a parallel that further strengthens the uncanny bond between them. Neither character has benefited from his transgression. On the contrary, their hubris causes their professional downfall; through a clever publicity stunt, Garmony's wife manages to cause the scandal fuelled by Vernon's paper to backfire and shame the editor (this amounts to the scapegoater being scapegoated for his scapegoating!), while the melody composed by Clive at the expense of another's suffering is interpreted by the musical community to be a plagiarism of Beethoven's "Ode to Joy."

Auden's poetry also forms an interesting bridge between McEwan's prose and Girard's thought. Gil Bailie, a staunch supporter of Girard's theories, claims in his 1995 book, *Violence Unveiled: Humanity at the Crossroads*, that Auden's work often deals with Girardian themes, such as the singularity of Christianity's identification with victims instead of victimizers, as well as the role imitation plays in violence. Bailie quotes Auden's poem "Diaspora" that compares a state of antisemitic persecution to "a land of mirrors," an idea compatible with Girard's concept of the symmetry of doubles as the instigator of violence. (Bailie 1995, 22-23; 94-95).

Unable to acknowledge the parallels of their respective disgraces, Clive and Vernon keep insisting on being fundamentally different. Vernon accuses Clive of putting art before people,

whereas Clive dismisses Vernon's lofty jurisprudence as a distraction from his lucrative muck-racking at a human cost (*A*, 119-120). Each man blames the other for committing a cardinal sin and holds a blinding mirror to the other's face:

‘This is outrageous. Go to the police, Clive. It’s your moral duty.’  
 An audible intake of breath, another pause as though for reconsideration, then,  
 ‘You’re telling me my moral duty? You? Of all people?’  
 ‘Meaning what?’  
 ‘Meaning these photographs. Meaning crapping on Molly’s grave...’  
 The excremental reference to a non-existent burial place marked that point in a dispute when a corner is turned and all restraints are off. (*A*, 119)

The irony in this sound and fury of a mutual call for compassion is, of course, that it signifies nothing; the empathy allocated to the victims of both men – the posthumously betrayed Molly and the nearly raped anonymous hiker, respectively – does not prevent Clive and Vernon from committing further violence, this time against each other and to a fatal extent. The way the foes up the ante in their verbal discourse anticipates their physical pursuit of *kudos* with which the novel ends – the *kudos* actually going to a third party, George Lane, who stands to benefit from the elimination of his two rivals.<sup>40</sup>

The take-no-prisoners narrative climax of *Amsterdam* further recalls the Greek myth of the feuding brothers Eteocles and Polyneices who died in each other's arms, most famously recounted in Sophocles's *Antigone*. In *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World*, Girard quotes the tragedy as an example of how fratricide typically represents mimetic conflict in fiction: “In their double destiny, the two brothers have perished in a single day, giving and receiving blows from their unjust arms” (Girard 1987, 243; cf. Girard 2005, 61). “Enemy brothers” serve as a symbol for horrifying sameness and the disintegration of individuality. The brotherly feud, then, seeks to restore the lost autonomy of the individual (Girard 1987, 38-39). In the Roman myth of Romulus and Remus this goal is achieved; after slaying Remus, Romulus thrives (Girard 1987, 146-147). But in the Greek story of Eteocles and Polyneices, violence swallows both brothers. Also, in *Amsterdam*, the “mutual murder” (*A*, 177) suggests a sameness which is consolidated by death, not unravelled by it: “They looked surprisingly at peace. Vernon had his lips parted slightly, as though he were halfway through saying something interesting, while Clive had the happy air of a man drowning in applause” (*A*, 176). Though ironical, this symmetry evident in the dead bodies is no less fearful; in the end, the differences between Clive and Vernon have all but disappeared;

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<sup>40</sup> “Kudos passes to the man who strikes the hardest—the victor of the moment” (Girard 2005, 161).

although the expressions on the faces of the two corpses are different, they are nevertheless expressive of the same thing, the delusion of mimetic prestige. Their Sophoclean “double destiny” has become manifest.<sup>41</sup>

The identity that encapsulates Clive and Vernon despite the initial disparity of their actions (their hubristic “mistakes” à la Auden) recalls Paisley Livingston’s demonstration of how mimetic desire affects the rivals symmetrically even if the initial actions of the two parties involved are not always commensurate. In his book, *Models of Desire: René Girard and the Psychology of Mimesis* (1992), Livingston shows how, in the medieval Icelandic epic, *Brennu-Njáls saga*, the feud that erupts between two central female characters, Bergþóra and Hallgerðr, is ignited by a symbolical change in the dinner table seating order whereby Hallgerðr’s social rank is purportedly violated, and, after Hallgerðr is thus provoked to verbally insult her hostess Bergþóra (as well as her husband, the eponymous Njál), Bergþóra must raise the stakes to save face; she therefore hurls an even sorer insult at her guest (cf. Livingston, *ibid.*). The women’s feud then proceeds to involve a piece of wood cut from a shared forest; the tug of war further escalates into an all-consuming murderous rampage, with the two women taking turns in goading their male relatives and servants into a dizzying cycle of revenge. When it comes to wounded pride, a single issue quickly becomes everything there is:

The narrative gives us a glimpse into Hallgerðr’s reasoning when she decides to launch the first attack, for we read that she tells herself that Bergþóra is trying to “rob” her. The object of this “theft,” however, is not any particular thing at all—it is certainly not the wood that the luckless woodcutter would have taken from the forest shared by the two families. Rather, Hallgerðr’s accusation is more diffuse and general: Bergþóra, she complains, thinks that she is going to rob her “in everything.” (Livingston 1992, 150)

Similarly, in *Amsterdam*, the disagreement concerning the publication of the Garmony photographs ends up costing Clive and Vernon their lives. The professional mistakes resulting from their private war of words over the Garmony affair, are not, initially, the same mistakes (just as the insults made by Bergþóra and Hallgerðr in Livingston’s example are not the same insults). However, as Livingston aptly puts it, “[t]he motivations—a desire to get the upper

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<sup>41</sup> There is an external difference between the final earthly moments of Clive and Vernon, and that is that Vernon seems to realize who his assailants are, whereas Clive continues to believe until the end that the doctor and nurse performing euthanasia on him are asking for his autograph – a signature that is in reality a formal mandate by which his killing is legalized. However, the difference is not essential, since it does not highlight any real insight on Vernon’s part; although he suspects that he is in fact being murdered, he does not regret the logic of violence that has made him the dupe of his own scheme.

hand—are highly similar” (Livingston 1992, 152). In his *Shakespeare* book, Girard comments on the propensity the rivals have to blame each other for not this or that setback, but for *all* setbacks (as was seen in the epic case of Bergþóra and Hallgerðr): “Conflicts are still ‘rational’ to the extent at least that each double is entitled to call his antagonist ‘his own,’ when he designates him as the man responsible for all his troubles” (Girard 2004, 185-186). In the end, the vengeful actions of the two Icelandic matrons are, in fact, the same, as both take turns in inciting reciprocal vendettas. For Girard, this kind of escalation marks the end of “rational” conflicts, “[s]ince mimetic effects constantly intensify but can no longer influence the choice of objects” and thus “they must affect the choice of the only entities left inside the system, the doubles themselves” (Girard 2004, 186). In the same way, in *Amsterdam*, Clive and Vernon’s similar mistakes escalate into reciprocal accusations and lead finally to mutual destruction in an identical fashion. Similar has become the same.

### 3.3 Doubles and the Disintegration of the Self

The fearful symmetry of *Amsterdam* is no doubt related to the established motif of the literary double. Something of the ‘brotherly’ feud described above could well be considered as a precursory stage to a doubling of the rivals involved in it. In *Violence and the Sacred*, Girard articulates this theory of the erosion of differences in the mimetic mirror-image relationship:

The antagonists caught up in the sacrificial crisis invariably believe themselves separated by insurmountable differences. In reality, however, these differences gradually wear away. Everywhere we now encounter the same desire, the same antagonism, the same strategies – the same illusion of rigid differentiation within a pattern of ever-expanding uniformity. As the crisis grows more acute, the community members are transformed into “twins,” matching images of violence. I would be tempted to say that they are each *doubles* of the other. (Girard 2005, 83; italics in the original)

Earlier analyses of the role of doubles and doubling in fiction point to similar findings than Girard’s formulation, even though their emphasis is often less anthropological and more heavily symbolical. Ralph Tymms, in his book *Doubles in Literary Psychology* (1949), writes that, “The process of self-projection [...] culminates in the subject’s identification of himself with an identical person, in whom he believes he sees a second self” (Tymms 1949, 110). Tymms also suggests, that the motif of the double is often tantamount to a literary character’s



need to escape from one's self, "from the compulsive ideas that have made life intolerable, into a mirror-world of reversed fortune" (Tymms 1949, 110).

Although *Amsterdam* demonstrates the doubling of characters in its most violently reciprocal and rigorously symmetrical extremes, the escapist identity project is also very much at work in *The Secret History*, although the relationship between Richard and Henry retains its hierarchical nature – 'metaphysically', at least, if not socially – unlike the interaction of Clive and Vernon which is more symmetrical from the start. Richard's shame of his supposedly mundane social background and mediocre personality are mirrored in Julian's lecture on the Furies of Greek mythology and how they prey upon the tragic characters' self-loathing:

'Our own selves make us most unhappy, and that's why we're so anxious to lose them, don't you think? Remember the Erinyes?'

'The Furies,' said Bunny, his eyes dazzled and lost beneath the bang of hair.

'Exactly. And how did they drive people mad? They turned up the volume of the inner monologue, magnified qualities already present to great excess, made people so much themselves that they couldn't stand it.' (*SH*, 38-39)

The main characters of McEwan's novel represent the very best of their fields – journalism and music, respectively – whereas the narrator of Tartt's novel is always the apprentice and never the master. Indeed, Clive and Vernon share the main character status of their actual textual world, which is constructed by an omniscient third-person narrator and is therefore 'objective,' even while frequently relying on character focalization. The narrative universe of Richard, on the other hand, is subjective in the sense that it is constructed by himself in the first person. Ironically, Richard is provided a chance to enhance his objectivity as a result of witnessing Henry's tragic fate and learning from his model's errors, whereas an opportunity to contemplate the mimetic laws of interaction has passed by both Clive and Vernon, driven as they are to a literal dead end of resentment and rivalry.

The culmination point of mimetic rivalry, namely the point where imitator and model no longer fight over objects but instead fight each other, is also the stage where rivals turn into doubles and regard each other as monstrous embodiments of persecution. The realistic treatment of doubles in the novels at hand (as opposed to the supernatural approach favoured by horror romances) does not exclude the possibility or indeed the probability of such hallucinatory phenomena. But these hallucinations, even though illusionary in themselves, nevertheless reflect a real existence of mimetic desire which in turn projects these seemingly fantastic mirages of the Other (cf. Girard 2005, 83). The nightmarishly uncanny quality of

doubles is evident in the final death scenes of *Amsterdam* where Clive in his last lingering moments of consciousness confuses the rogue euthanasia doctor about to give him the lethal injection with the antagonistic music critic Paul Lanark; Vernon, in an almost identical scene, mistakes the same doctor with a nemesis of his own, the scheming deputy foreign editor Frank Dibben who has usurped his editorial throne. To both men the nurse accompanying the doctor appears as a ghostly version of Molly, although, in the case of Clive's hallucination, the vengeful woman figure hovering over him is simultaneously an incarnation of the woman hiker he abandoned to her fate in the Lake District resort.

The whole narrative universe of McEwan's novel is littered with double motifs. Some of these appear on the surface to be merely humorous set pieces such as the case of the Siamese twins who do not get along and whose sibling rivalry is the subject of a human interest story researched by Vernon's paper:

‘I want to run the Siamese twins story in Friday's paper.’

[...].

The home editor, Jeremy Ball, said, ‘We spoke last week and it was OK. Then he phoned yesterday. I mean, it was the other half. The other head. Doesn't want to talk. Doesn't want a picture.’

‘Oh God!’ Vernon cried. ‘Don't you see? That's all part of the story. They've fallen out. First thing anyone would want to know – how do they settle disputes?’

Lettice was looking gloomy. She said, ‘Apparently there are bite marks. On both faces.’

‘Brilliant!’ Vernon exclaimed. (A, 37)

The newsroom dialogue betrays more than just a flippant anecdote of yellow journalism. Despite being treated as a circus attraction by the exploitative mass media, the Siamese twins are real people whose feud is analogous to the editor's personal crisis which also involves a “falling out” and an even more drastic strategy of settling a dispute than just face biting. The reference to the reciprocally hostile twins also lays bare the seamless connection between the brotherly feud and the doubling of rivals.

In *The Secret History* there is also a plethora of doubles, and they seem to be especially omnipresent in the narrative sequence covering Bunny's funeral where their main function is to mirror the guilt of Richard and the other Greek students responsible for the murder – a guilt known only to the murderers themselves. The connection between guilt and the motif of the double is most apparent in a scene where, much to his horror, Richard notices the striking family resemblance shared by Bunny and his brothers and father:

Hugh Corcoran, in shirtsleeves, went around with a bottle freshening drinks, nudging his way through the dark, murmuring crowd. He brushed me without a glance. Of all the brothers, he bore the strongest resemblance to Bunny (Bunny's death was starting to seem some horrible kind of generative act, more Bunnys popping up everywhere I looked, Bunnys coming out of the woodwork), and it was akin to looking into the future and seeing what Bunny would have looked like at thirty-five, just as looking at his father was like seeing him at sixty. I knew him and he didn't know me. (*SH*, 446-447)

Another doubling experience taking place at the funeral is the sighting by Richard of a man who looks like Julian but is not (*SH*, 464-465). Even though the real Julian is among the guests, the fact that Richard sees his teacher's look-alike is symptomatic of his constant preoccupation with Julian's character; Julian is, after all, mimetically responsible for the murders committed by his disciples. In similar fashion, Bunny's father tells an anecdote about a young Henry only to be told by his sons that he has mistaken him for another friend of the family (*SH*, 451-452).

The funeral sequence also includes a humorous dimension of the double motif with its description of a small scale brotherly, or rather, 'sisterly,' feud; both of Bunny's sister-in-laws, with their seemingly opposite personalities clashing (*SH*, 460-461), are named Lisa, a fact "which made for a lot of confusion around the house" (*SH*, 460). Furthermore, on their way back from Bunny's family home, the twins themselves quarrel over something too insignificant to mention, paving the way for their eventual falling-out. Despite the traumatic circumstances, Richard cannot help but view the twins' pouting with amusement:

Now, for some reason, it was Charles and Camilla who weren't speaking. They'd fought about something – I'd seen them arguing in the yard – and all the way home, in the back seat, they sat side by side and stared straight ahead, their arms folded across their chests in what I am sure they did not realize was a comically identical fashion. (*SH*, 477)

As pointed out by Girard, the actual objects of feuding are often mere trifles ("*for some reason*"; "*They'd fought about something [...]*") and hardly seem to call for the extreme violence that often follows (e.g., Girard 1987, 16). Moreover, judging from Richard's bemused observation, rivalry between two parties really is easy to recognize from the outside ("*I'd seen them arguing in the yard [...]*"), while inside the conflict there is no room for even the most superficial detachment ("*I am sure they did not realize [...]*"). As in the case of the Siamese twins in *Amsterdam*, also in *The Secret History*, a small curiosity concerning doubles becomes symptomatic of the whole narrative universe.

The same case of comical doubling could also be made for Toni Morrison's *Sula*. The three boys from disparate backgrounds who are informally adopted by the Peace household and from then on called Dewey, or rather "the deweys" in the lowercase plural, by Eva Peace at first appear to be mere anecdotes illustrating Eva's vast eccentricity ("What you need to tell them apart for? They's all deweys."; *S*, 38), but as the story unravels, the trinity of these identical figures quite clearly serves as a commentary on the undifferentiated qualities of the citizens of "the Bottom" in general and Sula and Nel in particular. For example, it is during Nel's wedding, with Sula as bridesmaid feeling "no less excited about" (*S*, 84) the event, when the deweys are suddenly mentioned in a seemingly non sequitur manner by the narrator: "[...] at the wedding where everybody realized for the first time that except for their magnificent teeth, the deweys would never grow" (*S*, 84).

The wedding sequence marks the last idyllic phase in the relationship between Nel and Sula. When Sula returns to the Bottom after a decade of absence it does not take long for a rift to spread between the two women, culminating in Sula's having an affair with Nel's husband Jude. This transgression leads to the breakup of the marriage that Sula was so happy to witness. Later Sula herself is abandoned by her lover Ajax, the one man she would have been happy to settle down with. The shock of desertion experienced by both women is narrated in a similarly associative and melancholy tone (*S*, 104-106; 134-137). The affair marks a rupture in the former symbiosis of Nel and Sula. But the symmetry of their tragedies in love also indicates their fundamental sameness, a complicity Nel realizes only at the end, when Eva confronts her about her and Sula's shared guilt over the accidental death of Chicken Little when the girls were twelve. In that sense Nel has not allowed herself to develop and is therefore spiritually as halted in her growth as the deweys are mentally.

Nel's inward stuntedness is also mirrored in the rigidity of her appearance:

At thirty her hot brown eyes had turned to agate, and her skin had taken on the sheen of maple struck down, split and sanded at the height of its green. Virtue, bleak and drawn, was her only mooring. (*S*, 139)

Nel continues to go on living a mechanical existence of an empty shell, as if an alien substance, equivalent with death (an agency so morbid that it is able to, as it were, strike down a tree at the height of its green), had taken over her body. But unlike the deweys who remain locked within a childhood world, Nel's regression has the outward countenance of the proverbial old maid, someone who has dried up and withered before her time. By contrast, a seemingly nymphomaniac Sula, in allowing herself to sleep with her best friend's husband,

demonstrates a distinct childishness (or what is often perceived as such, since imitative desire in adults is more repressed; Girard 2005,155) of desire by refusing to differentiate between the objects belonging to others and those available to the self. Sula is thus the more infantile of the two women and the one explicitly associated with the deweys' Peter Panism. But the two manifestations of spiritual arrest could also be viewed as two faces of the same coin. Notice how years after Sula's death, Nel for the first time realizes her own spiritual immaturity as evident in the thrill she experienced while watching Chicken Little drown – a transgression that took place in her and Sula's twelfth year, in their *childhood*, “[i]n that mercury mood in July” when the girls “wandered about the Bottom looking for mischief” (S, 56). To *look* beyond one's years, as Nel starts to after her marital trauma (and after she quite literally loses her “greenness,” her husband Jude *Greene*), is not tantamount to *being* more mature, but is merely another extreme symptom of the loss of inner vitality (the other being infantile regression).

That the deweys mirror the development – or lack thereof – of the two protagonists, is again implied, when at their ill-fated reunification ten years after the wedding, Nel and Sula discuss the uncanny resemblance of these metaphysical (though not biological) triplets:

“[...] the deweys still crazy.”  
 “I heard one of 'em's mamma came to take him back but didn't know which was hern.”  
 “Don't nobody know.” (S, 100)

The metaphysical dimension of the deweys' likeness is made all the more clear by the fact that they are actually *not* physically similar; their features and ethnic backgrounds vary, and they are even of different age (S, 38). Their sameness therefore is founded on their adherence to models both hierarchical (Eva) and symmetrical (each other). This makes them a microcosm of their society.

Spark's *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, a novel employing a deceptively mundane and prosaic setting of the schoolroom, is nevertheless sprinkled with doubles, some of them bordering on the grotesque. One example of external sameness coinciding with imitative desire is the physical resemblance between Miss Brodie's male colleagues, Teddy Lloyd and Gordon Lowther, the first of whom is her true love idealized and the second her actual lover, doubling for the first. Another is the series of portraits painted by Miss Brodie's love interest, the art master Teddy Lloyd, that betrays an obsession with his female colleague regardless of

the original model. A group portrait of the “Brodie set” has each girl reproduced in the image of her teacher:

Teddy Lloyd’s passion for Jean Brodie was greatly in evidence in all the portraits he did of the Brodie set. He did them in a group during one summer term, wearing their panama hats in a different way, each hat adorning in a different way, each hat adorning, in a magical transfiguration, a different Jean Brodie under the forms of Rose, Sandy, Jenny, Mary, Monica and Eunice. (*PMJB*, 111)

This repetition compulsion of painting Miss Brodie again and again seems to haunt Mr Lloyd’s whole oeuvre, from the portraits of his own baby to those of Sandy who by now is his mistress (“[...] she said: ‘You are still making me look like Jean Brodie’. So he started a new canvas, but it was the same again.”; *PMJB*, 122).

Teddy Lloyd’s paintings of Sandy make it clear to the latter that she will always be a surrogate for Miss Brodie. This surrogate status is not limited to sexual rivalry which is only one of the mirror worlds of mimetic rivalry. It does not take Sandy long to get over her *erotic* affair with Mr Lloyd while still remaining in *mimetic* awe of Miss Brodie:

The more she discovered him to be still in love with Jean Brodie, the more she was curious about the mind that loved the woman. By the end of the year it happened that she had quite lost interest in the man himself, but was deeply absorbed in his mind [...]. (*PMJB*, 123)

Although Sandy scoffs at Teddy Lloyd’s compulsive desire for Miss Brodie, she is as much or even more obsessed with Miss Brodie than he is. One could even go as far as to say Sandy is possessed by her model. The overpowering and seemingly omnipresent influence of Miss Brodie and her multiplied images recall Girard’s concept of the “monstrous double,” a grotesque and hypnotic hallucination of otherness reminiscent of archaic ritual taking possession of a subject who is both enthralled and repelled by the sacred model (cf. Girard 2005, 175).

In Spark’s novel, doubling is also linked to immoralism which is presented as an object worthy of imitation on its own. Miss Brodie’s plans to make love vicariously to Mr Lloyd through the agency of Rose Stanley – and not Sandy Stranger – are motivated by at least a hint of transgression for transgression’s sake. Not surprisingly, this desire too is imitated by Sandy. On her own initiative, Sandy takes the place of Rose in Mr Lloyd’s bed, thus imitating not only Miss Brodie’s desire for the art teacher, but also her desire to rise above common morality, since Miss Brodie has attributed Rose with an immoralism related to D.H.

Lawrence's sensual heroines (cit. *PMJB*; cf. Whittaker 1984, 104). Sandy not only manages to sleep with Miss Brodie's love interest, but perhaps more importantly, manages to transgress bourgeois sexual ethics as an end in itself – and to do this without a surrogate as was Miss Brodie's intention in her vain grooming of Rose as Mr Lloyd's mistress.

The motif of possession via a portrait is even more explicit in Siri Hustvedt's *What I Loved* than in Spark's *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*. In Hustvedt's novel, Bill Wechsler's teenaged son Mark becomes involved in a kind of *folie à deux* with Teddy Giles, a charismatic but psychopathic artist. Giles, who is considered Bill's rival in the New York art world, acts as a surrogate father for Mark, thus rivaling Bill in matters private as well as professional. As an emotionally hollow drug addict, Mark is quite literally under the influence of Giles who is his role model, sadomasochistic lover and eventually, when Mark witnesses the murder of another boy by Giles, a senior partner in crime.

Like Spark's *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, Hustvedt's novel also employs the motif of the magical portrait, a common occurrence in classic *Doppelgänger* fiction, which, like Girard's anthropological definition of the monstrous double, has its roots in archaic religion as analyzed by, among others, Frazer in *The Golden Bough* (Frazer 1994, Volume I, 148-149).<sup>42</sup> Whereas Teddy Lloyd's group portrait of Miss Brodie's flock has the six girls duplicated via "magical transfiguration" in their mentor's image, in *What I Loved* there is a more brutal and visceral employment of the portrait double motif as demonstrated by Teddy Giles's artwork. While confronting Giles about his involvement with Mark, the main character Leo Hertzberg notices that Giles has purchased a painting of an infant Mark by Bill. Leo later finds out why: Giles has used Bill's work as part of his own:

The story was only a rumor then, one of those floating bits of gossip that Lazlo seemed to snatch from thin air, but a week later, the show opened and we knew it was true. Teddy Giles had used the painting of Mark in his new exhibition. The scandal revolved around the fact that the valuable canvas had been destroyed. A figure of a murdered woman, missing one arm and leg, had been pushed through Bill's painting of his son. Her head protruded through one side of the canvas, choking her at the neck. The rest of her maimed body stuck out on the other side. The force of the piece relied on the fact that an original work of art, owned by Giles, was now as mutilated as the mannequin. (*WIL*, 299)

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<sup>42</sup> See also Tymms (1949, 88) on the "taboo of the portrait double": "In some primitive religions, the portrait, like the reflection and shadow, is thought to be capable of containing, or annexing, a man's very soul; so that whoever possesses the portrait has power over the original." Tymms refers to Frazer (*The Golden Bough*, Pt. II, p. 96 /cit. Tymms 1949, 88).

Through his symbolic and performative act of mayhem, Giles has violated his rival in art, Bill. In triangular fashion, his mimetic desire seeks to take possession of an object fought over by both men (Mark is Bill's biological son, but is in a way adopted by Giles), while in the end targeting the model of desire (Bill is the author of the "original work of art" just like he is the original father of Mark).

Giles's imitation of Bill is revealed to be even more uncanny by his referring to Mark with a nickname "M&M," the famous brand of sweets used in Bill's art installation called *O's Journey*, itself a meditation on the strong childhood bond between Mark and Leo's dead son Matthew and the diminishment of Mark's identity as a result of the loss of his friend – a friend who was also close to Bill (Matthew wanted to become an artist like Bill) and therefore a rival for fatherly affection. The essential theme underlying the novel as a whole is, of course, Leo's relationship with Bill and how the sons of the two men mirror it. Leo and Bill are rivals too, although their rivalry never boils over or turns into a brotherly feud proper. True, Leo manages to get erotically involved with both women in Bill's life but never while Bill is actively in the picture; Leo has his awkward one night stand with his friend's ex-wife Lucille only after the marriage is over, and he does not make an overture on Bill's second wife Violet with whom he has fallen deeply in love until the end of the novel by which time Bill has been long dead. Although it seems that Leo and Bill's interaction is overwhelmingly benign and starkly contrasted with the symbiotic dependence shared by Giles and Mark, as well as with the rather one-sided feud between Giles and Bill, their friendship is also ambivalent. Leo is at first drawn to Bill's works (objects he does not want to share but is happy to contemplate and admire), but once he meets the artist himself, he falls under a kind of spell. Their first encounter foreshadows the many occasions during their friendship when Bill is seen as someone more handsome, more charismatic and more creative – indeed, more heroic – than Leo:

At six-two, he seemed to tower over me even though I couldn't have been more than a few inches shorter. I later decided that his almost magical appeal had something to do with his eyes. When he looked at me, he did so directly and without embarrassment, but at the same time I sensed his inwardness, his distraction. Although his curiosity about me seemed genuine, I also felt that he didn't want a thing from me. Bill gave off an air of autonomy so complete, it was irresistible. (WIL, 9)

Unlike in Tarrt's *The Secret History*, where Henry embodies both Christ-like and Satanic features, in Hustvedt's *What I Loved*, the 'good' model and the 'evil' model are separated into



two different characters, Bill Wechsler and Teddy Giles, respectively.<sup>43</sup> Still, Leo's admiration of Bill is in danger of taking a dark turn, in that he not only shares a desire for Bill's objects in sex and love, but also becomes a surrogate father for his son, while Bill has had a similarly privileged relationship with Leo's son Matthew. Thus Matthew and Mark – the two Ms – have truly become changelings (another installation by Bill is actually titled *The Changeling*), objects of transaction between Leo and Bill. The doubling of the sons seems to mirror that of the fathers. Indeed, Bill's last name, "Wechsler," which in German means 'exchanger,' explicitly alludes to this theme (although stressing "changing" rather than exchanging *per se*; *WIL*, 67).

The 'M&M' motif in *What I Loved* is a decidedly sinister one, as it also connotes the violent and sadistic side of Mark's personality – or rather the fact that he does not seem to have one, but is merely an empty vessel at Giles's disposal. Purportedly the two have cut the pair of letters in the skin of a girl belonging to Giles's 'family',<sup>44</sup> of teenagers, but instead of using the M&M brand as such, they have carved the letters M and W (with the W standing for an M turned upside down) that also spell Mark Wechsler's initials (*WIL*, 277-278). If "M&M" stands for Mark and Matthew, then its typological variation "MW" could be interpreted as a sign for what went wrong with Mark after Matthew's death or already before that – how his "M" has been toppled and perverted into a "W." To speculate further on the symbolic meaning of the letters and their connection to the motif of the double, one could recall a classic *Doppelgänger* tale, namely the short story "William Wilson" (1839) by Poe, famously about a man whose conscience takes the exact human shape of himself and follows him all throughout his life as a painful reminder of his moral corruption until the man kills his conscience embodied by this other self (p. 626-641). Regardless of whether or not Hustvedt has intended "William Wilson" as an intertext for *What I Loved* (indeed the eponymous character's initials read as W and W, or two toppled Ms), the relationship of Mark to Matthew is similar to that of Wilson to his conscience as namesake and double. Matthew in fact partly recognizes the doubling potential of Mark and himself, and like Bill, he processes this insight through his art in which a stand-in for Mark is a fictional character called "Ghosty Boy." It is only after Matthew's death that this connection becomes obvious and renders Matthew's description of his fantasy prophetic in retrospect: "He's kind of in me, you see. Half in me, and half out of me, and I know he's not real" (*WIL*, 79). "Not really real" is itself a doubled

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<sup>43</sup> Notice the ironic first name Theodore of "Teddy" Giles, meaning 'gift from God.' In fact, Giles seems to embody many traits that are traditionally attributed to Satan, such as the destruction of meaning and the perversion of truth, a parasitic identity devoid of personality, as well as murder.

<sup>44</sup> Charles Manson's murderous sect is an obvious real-life reference point to Giles's personality cult.

phrase in its meaning, since it *denotes* the fact that the character of Ghosty Boy is a figment of Matthew's imagination, while it simultaneously *connotes* that Mark as an actual person is somehow not real either.

In retrospect, Leo views Mark as the very opposite of Matthew, and perversely enough, it seems that Mark is the dead one and Matthew the living one; in a moment of rage, Leo even states to Mark that the portrait destroyed by Giles had more life to it than Mark the human being (*WIL*, 321). That Mark has exchanged his old father for a new one (or, indeed, a *real* father to a *fake* one) is evidenced in Giles's installation: his life-like childhood portrait is physically penetrated, in a sense raped (*WIL*, 300), by a lifeless mannequin, and this lifelessness has in actuality become his new identity – or lack thereof. Just like a son is thought to absorb his father's influence, Mark has caught Giles's inner void as if it were a disease, what Girard would probably call an ontological sickness.

#### 4 Collective Character Dynamics, Scapegoating and Sacrificial Crisis in Fictional Communities

The double motif is not limited to a love-hate relationship between two individuals, but it may involve whole communities. In *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World*, Girard points out the collective ramifications of the ever-increasing mimetic crisis and the erosion of cultural hierarchies following in its wake: “Humanity [...] is no longer capable of producing idols of violence around which it might achieve unanimity. We are therefore always and everywhere confronted with conflicts of the *doubles*” (Girard 1987, 136; italics in the original). In *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel* he already foreshadowed the collective dimension of mimetic desire, when he wrote in his analysis of Dostoevsky’s recurring suicide motif, that

As the mediator approaches, the phenomena connected with metaphysical desire tend to be of a collective nature. This is more apparent than ever in the supreme stage of desire. Thus in Dostoevsky, along with the individual suicide we find a quasi-suicide of the collectivity. (Girard 1976, 280)

In chapter four I will focus on imitations and interactions taking place within groups of characters, and the ensuing escalation of collective violence and strife in the story worlds and the narrative treatments thereof. While doing so, I aim to maintain the continuity between individual and collective dimensions of mimetic violence in the novels studied.

For example, in *The Secret History* there are two levels of imitation, the individual one (most importantly, Henry and Richard) and the collective one (Henry and the Classics class as a whole, including Camilla, Charles, Francis and even the eventual murder victim, Bunny). The same is true in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, where the relationship between Miss Brodie and Sandy is linked with the teacher’s interaction with the “set” of girls. In both Tartt and Spark, the instigator is, or appears to be, one person (Henry, Miss Brodie). But it could be argued, that the imitative cycle has not really got an instigating subject, only the ‘spirit’ of imitation and the contagion of violence, a kind of lynching mentality.

That the spiral of collective violence can be traced back to love-hate relationships between individuals is especially apparent in the above-mentioned novels that take place in classroom settings. Classrooms are, after all, places where hierarchical teacher-student interactions crisscross with symmetrical mirroring between peers, thus providing fertile breeding ground for double binds and mimetic feuds. In *The Secret History* and *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, Henry and Miss Brodie are imitators themselves, as well as instigators of imitation. Henry for one looks up to his teacher Julian as a mentor in his pursuit of Dionysiac

enlightenment, and Miss Brodie has a legion of aspiration figures and spiritual predecessors who range from Mary, Queen of Scots to contemporary actresses and ballerinas.

The same arbitrariness concerning the choice of instigator, or leader, is true with the choice of victim, or scapegoat, as well. With everybody imitating everybody, in the advance of secularism and democracy, all share the same secret, namely the desire to imitate the desires of others. Therefore, the murderers are fundamentally similar with their victims. This is what in Girard's anthropology constitutes the mimetic crisis of sacrificial offerings, which causes the catharsis resulting from the ritual killing being a short-lived one. Because the slaying of the scapegoat has failed to restore the fibre of society (in that the cause for strife, the mimetic secret of sameness, remains), the demand for new victims grows, escalating into what Girard calls the snowball effect of mimetic violence, namely, 'the sacrificial crisis.'

In the 'classroom' novels, the collective theme is of course very explicit, and the social networks formed by the characters figure largely in the stories they tell. *The Secret History* deals with the moral coming of age of college students, *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* follows six junior grade pupils into womanhood, and both texts emphasise the vital role of educational models – models that are often repressed from consciousness in the name of individualism.

The scapegoat figure of *The Secret History*, Bunny is singled out as a suitable victim because he is supposedly different from the other members of Henry's coterie, lacking in academic aptitude, social graces, and perhaps most importantly, wealth (the irony is, of course, that the narrator Richard is also poor, but he has other ways of compensating for this lack). However, Bunny's murder, unanimously executed, leaves the group disintegrating as a result of guilt and various personal grudges which the 'sacrifice' was unable to remove, after all. The sameness remains, as is evident, for example, in the incest practiced by two central characters, Charles and Camilla, who are also twins.

In *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, the role of the scapegoat is performed by Mary Macgreggor, the class idiot. Mary is not murdered, but she becomes a kind of habitual victim, a fact that is reflected in her premature death in "the blast furnace" (*PMJB*, 15) of a hotel fire. Another girl, Joyce Emily Hammond, dies while on her way to fight in the Spanish Civil War as a volunteer for the Fascist cause, having been brainwashed by Miss Brodie. If Miss Brodie is not exactly a murderer, she is all but one. That said, she is eventually victimized as well, a fate that in no way contradicts her initial role as a victimizer.

According to Girard, sacrifice is not necessarily black and white, that is to say, the surrogate victim mechanism is not either completely masked or unmasked. Between the

archaic mythology of the victim-saviour and the Judeo-Christian vindication of the victim's innocence lies a historical gray zone, a historical transition period when the victim's guilt was maintained while at the same time the act of violence was recognized for what it was. For Girard, typical examples of this kind of "text of persecution" marking a transition from myth to the Gospel would be the medieval records covering witch hunts and antisemitic pogroms. These are still narratives told from the point of view of the victimizers, but unlike myths proper, they nevertheless acknowledge that violence was used for the ostensible good of the community. In chapter 4.2., Morrison's *Sula* is analyzed from the perspective of the 'text of persecution' as it is exemplified in the character Eva Peace who embodies the kind of victimizer who is not only willing, but also knowing. Despite this knowledge – or rather because of it – Eva is not altogether at ease with her sacrificial act of murdering her son, Plum.

Though not taking place in the world of education, McEwan's *Amsterdam* and Hustvedt's *What I Loved* have equally explosive settings, when it comes to mimetic conflict on a collective scale, namely the contemporary British cultural-political scene and the New York art community, respectively.

#### **4.1 The 'Pharmakos' Motif in Muriel Spark's *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie***

Spark's *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* is quite explicitly concerned with scapegoating themes, and there are three separate characters each of whom falls prey to a surrogate victim mechanism: Mary Macgregor, Joyce Emily Hammond, and Miss Brodie herself. Let us focus for now on Mary Macgregor.

Even though Miss Brodie never employs outright violence, her non-physical abuse of Mary nevertheless equals symbolic scapegoating. Spark's biographer, Martin Stannard, recognizes a parallel between "[t]he appalling treatment of Mary Macgregor as scapegoat for everyone's malice" and "the hysterical racism of the Holocaust" (Stannard 2009, 253), and the Holocaust analogy is evoked also by Montgomery (2012, 100), who describes Mary as "Brodie's Jew," and Brown (2006). Mary's death, which is both public (it takes place in a hotel shared by other guests) and private (even though she is consumed by fire during wartime, it is not fire from a bombing or a battle), recalls Thomas J. Cousineau's Girard-influenced reading of James's *The Turn of the Screw* in which the death of young Miles from

heart failure is uncannily linked with his having been expelled from his school (cf. Cousineau 2004, 58) and is therefore reminiscent of teachers persecuting their students.

Miss Brodie's exploitation of Mary in Spark's novel would, in fact, serve as a textbook example of the kind of pragmatic sociology that scapegoating is symptomatic of. The removal of Mary from a classroom where an erotically risqué (or so the pre-pubescent girls tell themselves) art slide-show is in progress, quite unambiguously manages to calm down the hysterical pupils and quieten their giggles:

Miss Brodie, however, had already fastened on Mary Macgregor who was nearest to her. Mary's giggles had been caused by contagion, for she was too stupid to have any sex-wits of her own, and Mr Lloyd's lesson would never have affected her unless it had first affected the rest of the class. But now she was giggling openly like a dirty-minded child of an uncultured home. Miss Brodie grasped Mary's arm, jerked her to her feet and propelled her to the door where she thrust her outside and shut her out, returning as one who had solved the whole problem. As indeed she had, for the violent action sobered the girls and made them feel that, in the official sense, an unwanted ring-leader had been apprehended and they were no longer in the wrong. (*PMJB*, 50)

From the point of view of the omniscient narrator, the hidden machinations of Miss Brodie's class become unmasked: Mary is being treated as the ostensible cause of this epidemic of double-entendres sinking in, although she is by no means the real "ring-leader," having herself being made to giggle "by contagion." Not so for the characters themselves who prefer to consider the problem solved and opt to think Mary as being truly guilty. Moreover, the girls are "sobered" by the "violent action" taken by their teacher who by "apprehending" Mary and "shutting her out" has delivered all other pupils from their previous state of "being in the wrong." The failure to recognize Mary's victimhood on the story world level is made all the more ironic by this failure extending to Mary herself who just prior to her death at twenty-three looks back on her life and decides that the only time she was truly happy was when she was taught by Miss Brodie (*PMJB*, 15). Indeed, Mary's perpetual role in her short life is that of a scapegoat, regardless of Miss Brodie's patronage ("a silent lump, a nobody whom everybody could blame" at school, Mary continues to be treated as such a figure by her adult peer group, the Women's Royal Naval Service, or the Wrens, by whom she "was much blamed" for being "clumsy and incompetent"; *PMJB*, 8; 15).

Mary's life-long victimhood seems to point to her not being arbitrarily burdened with the role of scapegoat by Miss Brodie herself, as her "lumpish" nobody syndrome both predates and continues after Miss Brodie's inclusion of her in "the set" (as well as her subsequent

strategic exclusion from the same). But by showing that Miss Brodie is treating Mary as she is treated by practically everyone else inside or outside the classroom, does not leave the teacher off the hook. If anything, Miss Brodie's failure to transcend her ward's victimary status, not only demonstrates the teacher's overall hypocrisy, but, furthermore, it showcases her *similarity* with the conservative masses she is so anxious to *separate* herself and her pedagogy from.<sup>45</sup> As Patricia Waugh astutely notes, the non-conformity of Miss Brodie as opposed to the surrounding community's status quo is itself a form of conformity, and like her supposedly more conservative counterparts, the Brodie set also engages in "the practice of scapegoating and other forms of human sacrifice, to protect the identity of the group [...]" (Waugh 2010, 86). In an ironic but completely consistent turn of the plot, the scapegoating Miss Brodie is herself scapegoated by the headmistress Miss Mackay who, in order to retain the uniformity of her conservative school, finally manages to cast out the radical Miss Brodie. But despite the mainstream-orientedness of Miss Mackay and Miss Brodie's self-proclaimed innovativeness, the two teachers are not polar opposites; rather, their mimetic rivalry has turned them into mirror images. If Spark's biblical allegorizing of her novel presents Miss Mackay as a Caiaphas figure in the passion of Miss Brodie, then it is equally clear that Miss Brodie is not a true Christ figure but a mere parody thereof. Therefore, the 'Christ' figure of the story (Miss Brodie) is but a double to the Caiaphas figure (Miss Mackay). Miss Mackay and Miss Brodie are both scapegoaters, and in the Gospel of John, Caiaphas is a character embodying the spirit of surrogate sacrifice with his famous remark, "Nor consider that it is

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<sup>45</sup> In his article "'There's something about Mary': Narrative and Ethics in The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie," Peter Robert Brown discusses Mary Macgregor's character status from the viewpoint of Kantian philosophy, suggesting that Miss Brodie's "instrumentalist" treatment of Mary violates the categorical imperative, as the teacher clearly fails to regard her pupil as an end in herself (Brown 2012, 241-242). Brown argues against a Girardian reading of Spark's novel, "since Mary's victimization requires an interpretation that relies on more traditional ethical concepts" (Brown 2006, 241). I would, however, maintain that Girard's unmasking of the scapegoat mechanism is not diametrically opposed to Kant's criticism of ethical instrumentalism. For Brown, the unwitting and unconscious behavior inherent in the surrogate victim mechanism – indeed, its very *mechanicity* – relieves the characters of any moral responsibility of their own: "Following René Girard's claims about many persecutors, we can say that Miss Brodie does not understand what she is doing, that she erroneously believes that Mary is to blame" (ibid.). But is Miss Brodie's blindness to Mary's unique humanity, no matter how collectively shared and primordially induced that blindness may be, a sign of sincerity on her part? And furthermore, no matter how objective Mary's lump-likeness and clumsiness appear, both to the other characters inhabiting her story world and to the extra-diegetic narrator commenting on this fact, it does not necessarily follow that the implied author of the novel is condoning Mary's victimary status. On the contrary, the novel itself could be viewed as an agent unmasking the victimizing of Mary Macgregor precisely *because* it shows how common her "blaming" is.

I would also disagree with Brown's view on narrative bias. According to Brown (2006, 241) the narrative of Spark's novel conspires with the narrator, Miss Brodie and the other girls in scapegoating Mary and in treating her as a means rather than an end (Brown 2006, 241). I think that the relationship between the narration and the story is more frictional than that, with the text employing the narrator as a critical wedge between the audience and the characters. I would thus argue, that the narrator of Spark's novel is not as criminally involved in the victimary machinations of the story world as are the characters; however, the narrator is not overtly critical or judgemental about the characters.

expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not” (John 11:50<sup>46</sup>; cf. e.g., Girard 1989, 113: “[...] the ‘victimage’ mechanism [...] that controls the council of Caiaphas [...] controls our world”).

Unlike the archaic scapegoat of the founding murder, Mary is not killed by Miss Brodie in the teacher’s self-assigned role of high priestess (again, she is more like Caiaphas than Christ), nor is she shut out, i.e., banished from her class for good but merely until the next recess. Mary’s role as surrogate victim is thus forever renewable, making her something of a class mascot. The abuse suffered by Mary is repetitive precisely because the victim is allowed to stay alive and well – and thus kept constantly available for verbal and symbolical violence.

This lingering, parasitic quality of her scapegoat function bears strong resemblance to that of the Ancient Greek *pharmakos*,<sup>47</sup> albeit without the eventual killing or permanent expulsion inherent in this archaic practice (cf. Girard 2005, 9; 99). In his famous reading of *Phaedrus* (in “Plato’s Pharmacy”, published in the same year, 1972, as Girard’s *Violence and the Sacred*), Derrida analyzes Plato’s use of the concept *pharmakon*, denoting both a remedy and a poison, and, in a manner garnering respect from Girard (2005, 311-312), links it with the related term of *pharmakos*, meaning a victim of human sacrifice practiced in fifth-century Athens<sup>48</sup>:

The character of the *pharmakos* has been compared to a scapegoat. The *evil* and the *outside*, the expulsion of the evil, its exclusion out of the body (and out) of the city – these are the two major senses of the character of the ritual. (Derrida 1981, 130)

[...].

These parasites [=the *pharmakoi*] were as a matter of course domesticated by the living organism that housed them at its expense. (Derrida 1981, 133)

The Greek *pharmakoi* were “parasites” (ibid.), namely “the very dregs of society,” the likes of slaves, prisoners of war, and ritually uninitiated children (Girard 2005, 12). In today’s society, or, say, in a pre-World War II Edinburgh classroom, the *pharmakos* status could be assigned to an underachieving schoolgirl. The dynamics of such a sacrificial designation would still remain the same as in Platonic Athens, even though the modern Scottish scapegoat cannot be killed or even severely ostracized. Her death as a literal burnt offering in a hotel fire, though

<sup>46</sup> The English translation in the version of John’s Gospel otherwise referenced in this thesis is as follows: “[...] you do not use your judgement; it is more to your interest that one man should die for the people, than that the whole nation should be destroyed.”

<sup>47</sup> Derrida’s and Girard’s respective analyses of scapegoating and the concept *pharmakos* are also invoked in Brown’s (2006, 240-241) discussion of Mary’s victimary character status.

<sup>48</sup> See also Susan L. Mizruchi’s research on the way literature addresses sacrifice: “The literary authors [...] *stage* sacrifice. They offer a sacrificial theatre, whose purpose is to question different features of the sacrificial enterprise” (Mizruchi 1998, 12; italics in the original).



one not deliberately plotted by any intelligent enemy, nevertheless draws a parallel between Mary and the multitudes of nameless and faceless victims who would perish in the Second World War and the Holocaust; her fate in the fiery furnace also interestingly echoes the quasi-pharmakos status of Shadrack – the Biblical Shadrach – who is not killed by his community but is more subtly scapegoated by it. Mary as the designated class idiot and Shadrack as the eccentric outsider are like the possessed ‘Legion’ of the Gospels, analyzed through his reciprocated dependency with the community of Gerasa by Girard in his *The Scapegoat*.

The character of Mary Macgregor corresponds to the ancient pharmakos also in the way she is perceived as an outsider and an insider at the same time, serving as a “domesticated” antidote to the “organism” that periodically needs something to fight against in order to stay healthy and functioning. Also, the sacrifice of Miss Brodie herself by Miss Mackay is in a manner comparable to Herodias’s manipulation of the traditional sacrificial function for the benefit of her personal vendetta when she commissions Salome to get John the Baptist executed (cf. Girard’s 1989, 140).

#### **4.2 The ‘Text of Persecution’ in Toni Morrison’s *Sula***

Although Morrison’s novel hinges on the relationship between Nel and Sula, the character of Eva Peace, Sula’s grandmother, exercises a powerful influence on both of the younger (anti)heroines. Whereas Nel and Sula appear as symmetrically dependent on each other, Eva seems to have no ‘equal’ in the story world. Still, towering as her stature might be, Eva is ‘mimetic’ to the core. Although her nonchalance in the face of disaster provides her with an air of almost supernatural autonomy (she martyrs herself by jumping in front of a train in order to collect insurance money to support her children, only to murder her son in a kind of impromptu euthanasia), Eva is very much preoccupied with the people around her. This preoccupation is fully revealed in the novel’s climax when Eva unmasks Nel’s guilt over Sula’s unfair treatment and Chicken Little’s sacrificial death, but Eva’s Satanic dimension has been glimpsed upon even earlier, most notably in her murder of her son Plum. Unwilling to remain at the mercy of his erratic and parasitic behaviour after he returns from the First World War as a hopeless drug addict, Eva sets Plum’s bed on fire while he is about to fall asleep in a narcotic stupor:

Plum on the rim of a warm light sleep was still chuckling. Mamma. She sure was somethin’. He felt twilight. Now there seemed to be some kind of wet light travelling

over his legs and stomach with a deeply attractive smell. It wound itself —this wet light— all about him, splashing and running into his skin. He opened his eyes and saw what he imagined was the great wing of an eagle pouring a wet lightness over him. Some kind of baptism, some kind of blessing, he thought. Everything is going to be all right, it said. Knowing that it was so he closed his eyes and sank back into the bright hole of sleep.

Eva stepped back from the bed and let the crutches rest under her arms. She rolled a bit of newspaper into a tight stick about six inches long, lit it and threw it onto the bed where the kerosene-soaked Plum lay in snug delight. Quickly, as the *whoosh* of flames engulfed him, she shut the door and made her slow and painful journey back to the top of the house. (S, 47-48)

Although she experiences acute pain over the suffering and death of her son, Eva is nonetheless a willing executioner. The immolation has more than a hint of euthanasia in it, since, as far as Eva is concerned, Plum is beyond saving and has lost all dignity of living. The merciful quality of Eva's life-taking act is further demonstrated by the victim's apparent lack of pain and even perverse enjoyment of being drowsed in kerosene (the "attractive smell" of which recalls the perfume of myth used to cover up the stench of bloody sacrifice<sup>49</sup>) and being engulfed by the comforting illusion of "the great wing of an eagle." However, the perspective changes too quickly from that of the victimized son to that of the victimizing mother for the reader to be fully convinced that Plum really feels no pain or horror in his very final moments.

Are Eva's motives for the killing truly selfless? Or were Plum's addiction and its attendant dependence a threat to her preciously won autonomy? Eva's answer to Hannah's inquiries about the motive seems to suggest as much: "There wasn't space for him in my womb. And he was crawlin' back. [...]. I had room enough in my heart, but not in my womb, not no more" (S, 71). That Eva's desire for autonomy is not motivated by sadism but by her fear of being dependent on becomes clear in her protestation that Plum could inhabit her heart but not her womb; she loves him despite having killed him ("But I held him close first. Real close. Sweet Plum. My baby boy."; S, 72). In her confession, Eva also stresses that she has killed Plum for the sake of preserving *his* autonomy and not merely her own:

I done everything I could to make him leave me and go on and live and be a man but he wouldn't and I had to keep him out so I just thought of a way he could die like a man not all scrunched up inside my womb, but like a man. (S, 72)

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<sup>49</sup> Unlike many if not most Judeo-Christian texts that reveal the fact of murder, whether justified (as in the more archaic parts of the Bible) or unjustified (in the core texts like the Prophets, the Psalms and the Gospels), the archaic myths cover up the bloody traces of their sacrifices: "No one ever detects in the myths the stench of corpses badly buried" (Girard 2001, 179).

Despite Eva's declarations of altruism she may very well have projected her own ideal of personal autonomy and fear of dependence on Plum who never had a chance to articulate any death wish of his own. The ambiguity of Eva's maternal feelings towards her "baby boy" whom she wanted to "die like a man" is further demonstrated by the duality she expresses by speaking "with two voices" (*S*, 71), yet another incident of the double motif recurring in *Sula*.

The perspective shift of the immolation scene is quite crucial when evaluating the moral soundness of Eva's transgression. First we have Plum's euphoric but delusional experience of being set on fire by her mother whom he continues to adore ("Mamma. She sure was somethin'."). Then we have Eva lighting the makeshift funeral pyre and watching her son be consumed by the flames. It could be argued, then, from Eva's having the last glance at the crime scene, that her perspective is the definitive one; the "painful journey" up the stairs is a further indication of the sad reality of a violent death, as opposed to Plum's (initially) happy delirium.

The apparent pleasantness of a violent death resembles the sugar-coating function of archaic myths that either dress up sacrificial murders into willing submissions of the victims or negate violence altogether. In the case of Eva's 'sacrifice' of Plum, this sugar-coating is hinted at by a peculiar oral metaphor. As she glances at Plum's disorganized room which corresponds to the chaos in the resident's mind, Eva notices "a glass of strawberry crush" on the floor (*S*, 46). As she later drinks from the glass, she realizes that the red liquid is actually "blood-tainted water" (*S*, 47). Eva's throwing the water to the floor clearly signals her final disillusionment with her son's bleak condition, but it could also foreground the reader's realization that Plum's demise is not really as sweet as he first fathoms, but like any violent death, it is in reality tainted with blood and leaves a foul taste in the mouth, to say the least. A fusion of blood and water could also be an allusion to Christ's Crucifixion, since in John 19:34 Jesus's side famously bleeds both blood and water when pierced with a lance. Consequently, Plum is identified with Jesus, the definitive innocent victim. Another interpretation could be that the combination of blood and water alludes not to Plum, but to Eva, who usurps Christ's position by recalling his 'Homoousian' character (the blood and water motif being indicative of Christ's simultaneous humanity and divinity).

Although decidedly Satanic in her violent, manipulative and amoral qualities, Eva is also presented as an agent of supreme charity. Her killing of her son Plum is directly contrasted with her futile yet courageous effort to save the life of her daughter Hannah. After Hannah accidentally catches fire, the one-legged Eva heroically jumps out of a third-floor window to quench the flames with her own body. Whereas after setting her son on fire she closes his

door to minimise his chances of survival, she smashes the windowpane with “fists and arms” (S, 75) to enable her desperately selfless attempt to rescue her daughter from an identical fate. This latter gesture is as ‘Christian’ as the former one is ‘Satanic.’

Eva’s desire to save Hannah at first glance makes her killing of Plum seem like an arbitrary preference of one child over another, but it is clear why she differentiates between the two; after all, Hannah is not a threat to Eva’s autonomy in the way that Plum was.

Plum’s death in the hands of his mother is contrasted with his being saved from great discomfort by her in his early childhood. When Plum is still an infant, Eva cures his bowel obstruction by manually removing his hardened stools via his anus. The intimately distasteful act is rendered even more heroic by the fact that she uses the remnants of a lard can to smoothen the painful process and thus “shov[es] the last bit of food she had in the world (besides three beets) up his ass” (S, 34). By sacrificing her own and her family’s food supply in times of need for one child’s well-being demonstrates to the reader, that material selfishness or lack of empathy at least are not Eva’s cardinal sins.

But why go so far as to kill her son later? Eva makes it clear to Hannah that whereas saving children is one thing, coming to the aid of grown men is quite another. Eva’s removing Plum’s painful stools from his *physical* body seems to prefigure *the removal of Plum himself* from Eva’s *social* body. Both removals are cathartic in the original sense of the Greek word ‘*katharma*’:

[The shamanistic] expulsion is frequently associated with some kind of symbolic object; for example, the healer may hold up a twig or a bit of cotton that he claims to have extracted from the body of the patient and that supposedly caused the illness” (Girard 2005, 302).

Girard goes on to assert, that the ancient Greeks were no less shamanistic than ‘primitive’ peoples, and that the term *katharma* equals “an evil object extracted by means of a similar ritual” (ibid.); furthermore, “*katharma*” is used as a variant of sacrificable *pharmakos* (ibid.). In *Sula*, Plum’s feces are real enough, but the juxtaposition of his childhood physical ailment and the psychological burden he imposes on Eva as an adult point to the symbolic and cathartic dimension of his removal-by-murder.

Although the implied reader of Morrison’s novel should refrain from judging Eva who is quite obviously rendered a larger-than-life character and a powerful anti-heroine by the implied author, it is an undisputed fact that Eva takes life and death into her own hands. It is ironic, that the same capacity for decisive action and willingness to literally get one’s hands

dirty that saves her son's life as a small child works later as a catalyst to put him to death. Eva is thus like the Old Testament God who both "gave" and "hath taken away" (cf. Job 1: 21). However, precisely because she is a human who usurps God's place, she behaves in a decidedly hubristic and anti-Christian manner. More importantly still, violence is – at least in the context of Girard's mimetic theory and those like-minded thinkers who share his non-sacrificial interpretation of Judeo-Christian theology (or anthropology) – an attribute of Satan, not God. The character of Eva Peace thus embodies the Girardian equation of violence and the metaphysical transgression of one's common humanity.

When Eva later says to Nel that she would never have done what the younger woman had done, namely watch someone die without doing anything at all, she is right; like Sula in her accidental drowning of Chicken Little, Eva is very much a doer. True, she does watch Plum burn, but she has caused the fire on purpose (unlike Sula, who, though more active than the purely voyeuristic Nel, nevertheless performs the drowning by accident). Morrison's narrative implies that Eva is more honest than Nel (prior to her conversion which is itself brought about by the encounter with Eva); Eva is less of a whited sepulchre than Nel, since she wears her moral taint with pride and on the surface. She knows that what appears to be a strawberry-flavoured softdrink is really blood-tainted water.

However, Eva's honesty is only relative. Unlike Nel, she does not pretend that she has had no part in another person's death. But, unlike Sula, she is not consumed by her guilt, and this is because she thinks herself justified in her motive for the killing of her son. Also, her visionary role in 'converting' Nel in the end of the novel is marred by her proneness to judge the younger woman and exonerate herself ("You watched, didn't you? Me, I never would've watched."; *S*, 168).

To make matters even more ambiguous, one could all the same claim that Eva experiences a conversion of sorts, namely a turning away from mimeticism, that is similar to that of Nel. In the final encounter between the older and the younger woman, Eva is by now senile and only has moments of lucidity. On one such "sane" (*S*, 169) occasion, she confronts Nel with her guilt over Chicken Little's death, but also refers to her own murderous transgression when she mentions Plum in a manner that draws parallels between the two victims:

"I want to know who you been talking to." Nel forced herself to speak normally.  
 "Plum. Sweet Plum. He tells me things." Eva laughed a light, tinkly giggle— girlish.  
 (*S*, 169)

Eva's demented and somewhat infantile claim that her long-dead son has been communicating with her could be interpreted as a sign of madness – a madness Girard would no doubt attribute to Eva's escalating mimeticism. There is, however, an alternative reading of the line, namely one that would stress Eva's recognition (no matter how provisional and muddled) of Plum as a murder victim on par with Chicken Little. By calling her son "sweet" Eva emphasises his child-likeness and therefore implicitly critiques her prime motive for having killed him: his infantile regression and embarrassing desire to crawl back into his mother's womb.

The ambiguity of Eva's character derives from the fact that she is an amalgam of the characteristics of the two main characters, namely Sula and Nel. Like Sula, Eva is unapologetic in her transgression of social norms; like Nel, she is a pillar of society and a *mater familias*. Whereas Sula masochistically sets herself up as a victim for the community<sup>50</sup> and does not even try to avoid conflict, and whereas Nel conforms to societal pressure to the point of self-effacement, Eva is both aggressive and manipulative, and therefore she is simultaneously a cohesive and a disruptive force within the community.<sup>51</sup> This duality of strife and harmony makes her the most 'Satanic' of all the characters in Morrison's novel, without cancelling out her commendable and charitable 'Christian' qualities.

Though Plum's murder resembles a mythical sacrifice, it is only partially that. The sugar-coating mythology of a pleasant departure is ultimately unmasked for what it is; Plum, with his subjective experience of kerosene and fire as "baptism" and "blessing" (*S*, 47), may at first think it so, but Eva (and through her perspective, the implied reader) knows it not to be so (ironically, the one performing the sacrifice is here more lucid and honest than the sacrificed!). Also, when Hannah quite dispassionately confronts her mother about Plum's death, she does not hesitate to use the word "kill" ("But what about Plum? What'd you kill Plum for, Mamma?"; *S*, 70). Nor does Eva in her reply try to unmask the fact of the killing, but merely states that in her own view it was necessary. Unlike Nel, who maintains her

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<sup>50</sup> Indeed, it is her masochism already glanced at in chapter two that sets her apart from a Christ-like victim position that she otherwise embodies quite comprehensively.

<sup>51</sup> In her foreword to *Sula*, Morrison dissects her characters' representative qualities as follows: "Against [Hannah's] fairly modest claims to personal liberty are placed conventional and anarchic ones: Eva's physical sacrifice for economic freedom; Nel's accommodation to the protection marriage promises; Sula's resistance to either sacrifice or accommodation. Hannah's claims are acceptable in her neighborhood because they are nonfinancial and nonthreatening; she does not disturb or deplete family resources. Because her dependence is on another woman, Eva, who has both money and authority, she is not competitive. But Sula, although she does nothing so horrendous as what Eva does, is seen by the townspeople as not just competitive, but devouring, evil. Nel, with her most minimal demands, is seen as the muted standard" (*S*, xi).

innocence in the killing of Chicken Little until the very last moment in the narrative, Eva is open about her own murderous act, but stands ready to defend its efficacy.

The difference in the attitudes of Nel and Eva resembles the difference Girard points out when he discusses “the texts of persecution” as opposed to archaic myths. Unlike a myth, which masks the death of the victim and transfigures his or her fate into a vanishing or a successful escape, the text of persecution “is false, since it claims that the victims were guilty, but true insofar as there really were victims” (Girard 1989, 5). Girard’s example of such a text is the openly antisemitic introduction to *Judgement of the King of Navarre* (*Jugement du roy de Navarre*), a 1349 poem by Guillaume de Machaut which he analyzes at length in his book *The Scapegoat*. Although Machaut makes no secret of his belief in the Jewish community’s guilt in causing the deaths of a large Christian populace, and although the real culprit was very probably the Black Death (Girard 1989, 2), the poem still acknowledges that the Jews were real victims (albeit far from innocent ones) of a very real genocide. Already in *Things Hidden* Girard has defined the text of persecution as an account of collective murder that falls historically in between the archaic myth on the one hand and a Gospel-inspired, non-sacrificial narrative on the other:

[...] the medieval texts of persecution, like anti-semitic texts, records of the Inquisition, or witch trials, even if they still contain elements that are very close to mythology, in that the perspective they employ remains definable by a type of distortion close to that of myth, can be situated in an intermediary zone between mythology and the radi[c<sup>52</sup>]al demythication of which we ourselves are capable. These texts are much easier to decipher than myths because the transfiguration of the victim is much less powerful and complete than in myth. In texts of persecution [...] the victim has not been sacralised or has undergone only a vague attempt at sacralisation. (Girard 1987, 127)

Although not medieval, *Sula*’s story world is still partly immersed in mythology and partly already capable of transcending it, since the African-American rural communities in the early part of the twentieth century were permeated by an Evangelical Christianity that is itself prone to sacrificial fundamentalism (a very un-Christian tendency, in Girard’s opinion) and which – very much like the Medieval Roman Catholicism of Machaut’s fourteenth-century France – made additional allowances for folkloric and ‘pagan’ superstitions. Plum’s euphoric and infantile illusion of his impending death as a promise that “[e]verything is going to be all right” (*S*, 47) represents the mythological transfiguration of sacrifice that is modified by Eva’s and the implied author’s more somber acknowledgement of violence.

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<sup>52</sup> There is a typographical error in the original text, and the word should be “radical,” not “radial.”

Eva is thus couched in between Nel's mythological denial of guilt and Sula's post-sacrificial nihilism – a nihilism that is redeemed in her death scene through her forgiveness of Nel's hypocrisy and is thus connected to the Christian demythologization that has made both nihilism and forgiveness possible. It could be said then, that of the three central characters of Morrison's novel, Nel stands for the myth, Eva for the text of persecution, and Sula for the Gospel. It is no coincidence that Sula should give her name to the novel, since she represents the apocalyptic fork in the road of the history of the Bottom. Betrayed by her friend and partly corrupted by her grandmother and scandalized by her mother, Sula manages in the end to transcend the conflictual mimesis she has come to embody, having already transcended sacrificial mythology by refusing to accommodate her community's demands for what Morrison herself calls "the muted standard" (*S*, xi). Indeed, although readers of *Sula* sometimes emphasise the transgressive and non-conformist stance of the whole Peace matriarchy, Eva and – to a lesser degree – Hannah included (cf. Hinson 1993, 72), a fundamental difference between the motives of grandmother and granddaughter should be maintained. After all, Eva's non-conformism is paradoxically employed by her as a strategy to protect the status quo of her community – a community that strikingly enough *refuses* to ostracise her. Sula, however, is utterly demonized, as can be expected, given her thorough and vocal disregard for social norms.

Despite their different mimetic agendas – Eva's desire to protect the sacrificial order even though partly seeing through its mechanism and Sula's wilfully transgressive desire to defy this very mechanism – the two women are symmetrically doubled by their mutual antagonism. When Sula returns home from her big city *Wanderjahre*, she immediately locks horns with her grandmother who warns her of her impending hubris, invoking Biblical language to her aid:

"Bible say honor thy father and thy mother that thy days may be long upon the land thy God giveth thee."

"Mamma must have skipped that part. Her days wasn't too long."

"Pus mouth! God's going to strike you!"

"Which God? The one watched you burn Plum?"

"Don't talk to me about no burning. You watched your own mamma. You crazy roach! You the one should have been burnt!"

"But I ain't. Got that? I ain't. Any more fires in this house, I'm lighting them!"

"Hellfire don't need lighting and it's already burning in you..."

"Whatever's burning in me is mine!"

"Amen!"

"And I'll split this town in two and everything in it before I'll let you put it out!"

"Pride goeth before the fall."



“What the hell do I care about falling?  
“Amazing Grace.” (*S*, 93)

The dialogue between Eva and Sula, both inflammatory in tone and flammable in metaphor, reveals an important mimetic paradox, namely the coexistence of sacrificial stability – or the pursuit thereof – and an irrevocable escalation of reciprocity. Eva, disregarding her own previous transgressions of the religious and social order, wards off Sula’s attack on her moral integrity by blaming her granddaughter of similar infractions. Sula answers by fighting fire with fire, while remaining ignorant of her own mimeticism, namely that her rebellion stems from a desire to fight her grandmother for fighting’s sake and not out of any tangible moral objective (such as vindicating her murdered uncle). In her turn, Eva invokes the very same spiritual authority (the Ten Commandments) she herself has violated.<sup>53</sup>

Eva’s sudden piety is not out of character if we keep in mind her immolation of Plum, an act that is both transgressive and individualist (she cannot stand for her grown-up son depending on her autonomous person) *and* conformist and collective (Plum is a harmful parasite feeding on not only her own body but the social body of the Bottom). As was suggested earlier, Eva embodies the text of persecution, not outright myth, and is therefore, like Guillaume de Machaut and the whole historical Christian church institution, a citizen of both worlds, the archaic and the (genuinely) Christian. Sula, though on the whole more transgressive than Eva, similarly has her sacrificial side which is evidenced by her usurping of Eva by having her committed to an old people’s home soon after their argument (*S*, 94). She now occupies the same position as Eva does earlier, but this status quo is only fleeting, as she never wins the confidence of the community who are quick to scapegoat her. Of course, in her self-conscious rebellion against collective authority (one that her grandmother personifies even while transcending it<sup>54</sup>) Sula would not have it any other way.

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<sup>53</sup> Ironically, Eva warns Sula against defying the fourth commandment – one pertaining to respecting one’s elders – while both women have transgressed the fifth commandment, namely concerning killing (with regard to Sula, it is not so much the accidental killing of Chicken Little as it is her passive enjoyment of watching Hannah burn that signals the transgression). As far as mimetic conflict between the two women is concerned, they are also in violation of the commandment that for Girard is especially important (the already mentioned fifth notwithstanding), namely the tenth that warns against coveting that which belongs to another. Girard reminds his readers that coveting is just another word for mimetic desire and is therefore a very common sin, not a sign of excess or perversion (Girard 2001, 7-8). What Eva and Sula covet is power over the other, what a character in another novel examined in this thesis, Tartt’s *The Secret History*, calls the “fire of pure being” (*SH*, 45). Interestingly enough, “fire,” both its sacrificial containment and its conflictual unleashing, is the predominant metaphor in the argument between grandmother and granddaughter.

<sup>54</sup> In his dissertation, also informed by Girard’s theory, on Toni Morrison’s oeuvre, Hinson notes that “[a]s unconventional as Eva is by many standards, she is the first to try to fit Sula into a conventional role” (Hinson 1993, 76). It could be argued, then, that Eva uses her occasional transgressions as strategies to fortify the sacrificial order, not undo it like Sula does. In short, Eva transgresses so that others do not have to. Her role is

#### 4.3 The Victim as Subhuman Other: The Innocent Third Party in Donna Tartt's *The Secret History*

Donna Tartt's *The Secret History* displays a scapegoating motif that both parallels and differs from that of Morrison's *Sula*. For one thing, the college students of Tartt's novel resort to physical violence, something that the villagers in Morrison resist while happily abandoning themselves to the symbolical structure of surrogate victimage. But the fact of an actual ritual murder being committed in *The Secret History* should not delude the reader into thinking that Tartt's story world is somehow more archaic than Morrison's, or less permeated by an advancing sacrificial crisis. In fact, the opposite is true; after all, *Sula*'s scapegoating by the Bottomers takes place in the 1930's rural Midwest, whereas the main characters of *The Secret History* have their identities and mindsets moulded by the New England academic elite of the 1980's. It is precisely *because* the latter are more removed from village paganism and less influenced by its folklore superstition and (institutionalized) Christianity that they go to such lengths in *re-creating*, quite literally from the textbooks, 'authentically' archaic beliefs and practices. If the Greek students of Tartt's novel were truly and honestly pagan, they would not contemplate the Dionysiac religion in a philosophical or theological manner, but would on the contrary strive to keep away from the realm of the sacred as long as possible and only practice the bacchanal as a last resort to avoid interpersonal strife. The only reason for them to toy with religious phenomena that have ceased to have any meaning for twentieth-century Western society would appear to be idle fascination with an exotic subject. "In our own day," writes Girard in *Violence and the Sacred*, the Dionysiac orgy is simply another form of academicism" (Girard 2005, 310).

The irony of *The Secret History* is that only *after* the modern intellectuals have resorted to archaic practices do they experience the age-old need, hitherto dormant under centuries of secular enlightenment, for violence to deliver them from the evils that have surfaced as a result of their partnership in crime. Thus they repeat the 'sacrifice' in an unholy manner by eliminating their scapegoat, Bunny Corcoran, in order to restore a fragile peace.

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thus very much like that of a high priest – or perhaps, considering her partial recognition of violence – a medieval clergyman or Grand Inquisitor (in the Dostoevskyan sense). Furthermore, what distinguishes Eva from the character of Nel, "perhaps the most staunch defender of Medallion's values" (Hinson 1993, 79), is her persecutory stance on violence as something necessary, whereas Nel is more archaically mythological in her viewpoint, not recognizing until the very end that *Sula* is a victim of the community and not the other way around.

There are two murders in *The Secret History*: the first is the frenzied killing by the Hampden College Classics students (including Henry Winter, Francis Abernathy and the twins Charles and Camilla Macaulay, but excluding Bunny Corcoran and the narrator Richard Papen) of a chicken farmer who stumbles in on the Dionysiac bacchanal re-enacted on his piece of Vermont woodland; the second murder is that of Bunny Corcoran who has become alienated from the group and threatens to turn them in to the authorities. Therefore it would seem, that the two killings are different, the first being an almost accidental outcome of a celebration gone wrong, the second a cold-blooded and premeditated murder proper. However, it is worthy of note that the murders are really not that different from each other, as both of them bear the marks of sacrifice, as well as the sacrificial *crisis*. The murders of the farmer and Bunny, respectively, are symptomatic of the pursuit of difference and the repression of sameness on a collective level; the scapegoated victim is supposed to represent difference from the group and restore social unanimity, but all it manages to achieve is an escalation of violence and strife, because the difference did not exist in the first place, being merely an arbitrary concentration of everybody's mimetic rivalry against an 'outsider.' This outsider, of course, is not as external to the group as they think.

Before moving on to the sacrificial motif of *The Secret History*, let us first explore the collective dynamics underlying the interactions between the group of the novel's central characters and how the main character Richard relates to it.

When in the beginning of his narrative account of the past, Richard shakes the dust of his despised Californian hometown (the aptly named "Plano") off his heels and arrives at Hampden, a fictional liberal arts college in the rarefied atmosphere of cool and mountainous Vermont, he finds himself attracted to a small group of fellow undergraduates who seem to incarnate the "picturesque and fictive qualities" (*SH*, 17) characteristic of East Coast elitism. Whereas other Hampden students show themselves to be as mundane and low-brow in their preoccupations as Richard's less wealthy peers in the West, the five Classics majors emerge as a breed apart: "At close range [...] they were an arresting party – at least to me, who had never seen anything like them [...]" (*SH*, 17).

Richard's fascination with the Greek group corresponds to Girard's analysis of how the narrator in Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past* desires to be initiated into "an unfamiliar way of life" led by another character he admires (Girard 1976, 53). Richard's belatedness in

joining the group is a further incendiary to his mimetic desire, since he must over-compensate his latecomer status.<sup>55</sup>

It is worthy of note, that Richard acknowledges the subjectivity and partiality of his appraisal of the group at the time of the story world events; what renders the Greek party “arresting” to his gaze is the fact that he “had never seen anything like them” before. Therefore, it is the otherness *per se*, the difference from his own self (or his perception of his self) that brings about the fascination. The pluperfect tense used in this bit of the narration also suggests Richard the narrator having gained new insight into the motives behind his admiration of the others, whereas Richard the character lacks this critical distance at the time of experiencing the mimetic attraction towards his peers. This distance is still limited and the admission of romantic illusion still implicit, because Richard does not wholly deny that the group is worth admiring. However, the narrator’s criticism of the story world characters (himself included) becomes increasingly more explicit as Richard slowly and ruminatively traces his steps back to the events in “the secret history” of his partnership in crime and recounts it to his silent narratee – very possibly himself-as-narratee.

Meanwhile, as a character in the story world of his narrative, Richard finds himself uncritically and irresistibly drawn towards the five students who, along with their highly selective teacher Julian Morrow, alone constitute the Classics department of Hampden College. When Julian’s coterie for the first time notices him, Richard is taken aback by the reversal of the gaze: “I was confused by this sudden glare of attention; it was as if the characters in a favourite painting, absorbed in their own concerns, had looked up out of the canvas and spoken to me” (*SH*, 21-22).

All the harsher, then, is the disappointment, when Richard (prematurely, as it turns out) feels he has lost a valuable opportunity to access the Classicist “ranks”. The prospect of losing social prestige far outweighs Richard’s more prosaic preoccupation with pursuing his actual studies of philology and the “brutal, bludgeoning labor” (*SH*, 76) that goes with it:

I had plenty to worry about besides the coldness which apparently had infected my classmates once again, their crisp air of solidarity, the cool way their eyes seemed to look right through me. There had been an opening in their ranks, but now it was closed; I was back, it seemed, exactly where I’d begun. (*SH*, 76-77)

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<sup>55</sup> The belatedness of the mimetic rival has been analyzed by Thomas J. Cousineau in his reading of James’s *The Turn of the Screw* (e.g., Cousineau 2004, 34; 39).

But once this temporary break in communication is bridged and Richard is absorbed into the coveted “ranks,” the narrative allows idyllic reminiscences to take over for a time in order to contemplate communal life of leisure on weekends spent at a lakeside villa owned by a relative of Francis. These are at first only occasionally interrupted by darker tones foreshadowing future transgressions (Camilla cutting her foot on a shard of glass, metonymically suggesting the lethal bloodletting that is still to come; *SH*, 107-110; Charles losing his temper with Bunny when the latter expects to be waited on, which points to the more serious rift between Bunny and the rest; *SH*, 105).

At last, when Henry shares with him knowledge of the cultic experiments the group (with the exception of the notoriously undisciplined Bunny) has been conducting in the nearby forests, as well as the ensuing loss of life (presented to him as an unfortunate by-product of a loftier scheme), Richard’s initial shock soon gives way to a deeply felt solidarity towards the killers and a growing hostility against Bunny, an outcast Richard now replaces in the inner circle. Richard’s willingness to belong has intensified to what Girard’s mimetic theory would call a “metaphysical” degree, one that discards more concrete motives, in this case conventional morality and fear of the law.

As for the bacchanalia, Richard is as much an outsider as Bunny (indeed, he is Bunny’s double, entering the ‘Greek’ ranks just as Bunny is about to make his exit). He can only imagine the facts and contemplate the descriptions mediated to him by the celebrants themselves. The latter have gone to great lengths in re-creating the ancient setting that Dionysiac festivities demand, including sampling poisonous herbs and dressing up in togas cut out of bed sheets. What’s more, the group has sought to enter the archaic mindset, even when it comes to ideas of ritual purity. Camilla didactically explains to Richard the vital distinction between good and bad violence, and why Henry thought it necessary to slaughter a piglet to atone for the farmer’s murder:

‘Murder is pollution. The murderer defiles everyone he comes into contact with. And the only way to purify blood is through blood. We let the pig bleed on us. Then we went inside and washed it off. After that, we were okay.’ (*SH*, 404)

The sacrificial logic implicit in this strikingly anachronistic act corresponds to what Girard in *Violence and the Sacred* demonstrates as the urgency of keeping the amount of violence in check, so that there is enough but not too much bloodletting, and the killing still bears the blessed mark of a religious ritual instead of an awkward resemblance to murder (Girard 2005, 41-42). Camilla also admits that a similar blood ceremony will not be performed after

Bunny's death for fear of upsetting Richard who, even after loyally participating in the second murder, is apparently still regarded as too Modern and thus unworthy of this Ancient practice:

‘Oh, don’t worry,’ she said hastily. ‘I don’t think he plans on doing anything like that this time.’

‘Why? Didn’t it work?’

She failed to catch the sarcasm of this. ‘Oh, no,’ she said. ‘I think it *worked*, all right.’

‘Then why not do it again?’

‘Because I think Henry has got the idea that it might upset you.’ (*SH*, 404; italics in the original)

Camilla's calm assurance of the practical workability of an archaic and anachronistic religious ritual echoes Henry's equally no-nonsense account of the successful outcome of the fateful bacchanal. And like Henry with whose ideas she identifies, Camilla also stresses Richard's outside status in relation to the celebrants-turned-murderers.

Of course, the Greek students are much too saturated by two millennia of Christian theology and secular ethics to get away with their immoralism, or what Barbara A. Melvin rather coyly describes as the “pragmatic” streak of Greek ethics, as opposed to the moral philosophy of today's West (Melvin 1996, 56). But what causes them to make the effort to escape their modern conscience is a nostalgia for the hierarchical distinctions still intact in Platonic sociology but lost to their contemporary collegiate life. Like any sacrificial agents operating in the era of sacrificial crisis, the “Greeks” of Tartt's novel seek to restore the old ritual boundaries, even if this means fetishizing the religion they no longer can believe in (cf. Girard 1976, 158). The restoration of the kind of “healthy” and aristocratic paganism unconcerned with victims that Nietzsche famously advocated (Girard 2001, 174;179) is the promise waved in front of the Hampden Classicists by the smallest department of their otherwise up-to-date and politically correct university.

Egon Friedell, in his *Cultural History of the Modern Age* (1927-31), states that the Philhellenist movement of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was born out of modern anxiety (Friedell 1955, 430). This seems to be the case also with the modern (if not *postmodern*) characters of *The Secret History*, who attempt a rather more radical “Greek Revival” than what the likes of Winckelmann had in mind. The Philhellenists of Tartt's novel, who not-so-jokingly refer to the other Hampden students – and even the faculty members – with epithets like “barbarians” and “*hoi polloi*” (*SH*, 164; *SH*, 235), decidedly set themselves apart from these inferiors. Richard admiringly admits to being a mere tourist in the “beautiful and harrowing landscape” (*SH*, 224) of Ancient Greek, while Henry seems on the contrary to

feel more at home there, so much so that he seems to be out of place in the modern Anglophone world, speaking the English of “a well-educated foreigner” (*SH*, 225).

The Philhellenist nostalgia of Tartt’s characters is both juxtaposed with and contrasted with Nietzsche’s neo-pagan aesthetics. In *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche adorns Ancient Greek civilization with the greatest double-binding compliment possible, namely, that it is impossible to imitate: “One cannot *learn* from the Greeks – their style is too strange, it is too fluid, to be imperative or to have the effect of a classic (p. 84; italics in the original). Tartt herself has chosen another Nietzsche quote as her epitaph, namely the following warning from *Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen* (*Untimely Meditations*):

I enquire now as to the genesis of a philologist and assert the following:

1. A young man cannot possibly know what Greeks and Romans are.
2. He does not know whether he is suited for finding out about them.

This warning is, of course, a Batesonian double bind *par excellence*, and it functions as a call to the student to commit himself to the very task the teacher deems an unsuitable one.

Like the Proustian narrator, Richard is forever fascinated by the different and the strange, namely everything belonging to the Other (he is willing to believe Julian when the latter states that learning Greek language is tantamount to learning Greek modes of thought, as well; the value of this different thought seems to lie in its very difference; *SH*, 223). In effect, in the novel’s story world, which in large measure consists of a contemporary American college, to study Greek and Latin is more eccentric and therefore more prestigious than is studying French or German (*SH*, 13).

As exotic – and quixotic – as this state of constant anachronism in which Henry and Julian live is, it also has the potential of being rendered ridiculous. This is what Bunny does when he throws a damper on the lofty fantasy of his teacher and classmates to wage a Homeric kind of war on their complacent college town – a joke that foreshadows the very real murder of a local ‘regular Joe’:

Julian laughed. ‘And how many years has it been since the gods have intervened in human wars? I expect Apollo and Athena Nike would come down to fight at your side, “invited or uninvited,” as the oracle at Delphi said to the Spartans. Imagine what heroes you’d be.’

‘Demigods,’ said Francis, laughing. ‘We could sit on the thrones in the town square.’

‘While the local merchants paid you tribute.’

‘Gold. Peacocks and ivory.’

‘Cheddar cheese and common crackers more like it,’ Bunny said. (*SH*, 39-40)

It is amidst this verbal firework of anachronisms, that Julian, “displeased” (*ibid.*) by Bunny’s relativizing remark, makes his speech about the beauty of terror in Greek literature. The reason why Julian is upset by Bunny’s gibe might not only lie in its flippancy, but in its demystifying brusqueness; Bunny has been indelicate enough to speak the obvious, namely point out the incongruity between the archaic and contemporary mindset. The irony is that this incongruity is exactly the point inherent in Julian’s joke. But although he pokes gentle fun of his own anachronistic aesthetics, he is not willing to ridicule it outright. This is because he truly believes in his own anti-modernist ideology. Bunny’s disparaging comment serves to anticipate his falling out of step with the other Greek students, as he is already straddling the thin line between them and the ‘Barbarians.’

In her analysis of *The Secret History*, informed by the moral psychology behind the split into Ancient and Modern identity, Melvin writes:

[Tartt’s] characters, repelled by the party atmosphere of not only their college but of their society, disastrously attempt to resurrect an ethics system that, although admittedly based on elitism, seems nevertheless more honorable and reasonable in comparison with the degenerate moral climate they find themselves in. (Melvin 1996, 55)

Melvin’s interpretation of the characters’ psychological motivation is sound enough, but she fails to question it, taking the anxiety described in Tartt’s story world at face value and treating it as an understandable and even sympathetic “O tempora, o mores” lamentation on the part of rebellious outsiders. Tartt herself is certainly much more critical of her own characters. When Francis, for example, belittles the human loss involved in the murder of the Vermont farmer by saying that “[...] this man was not exactly *Voltaire* we killed” (*SH*, 220; italics in the original), the elitism inherent in his remark is not merely “admitted” but blatantly ridiculed by the implied authorial voice.

The elitism of Tartt’s characters is not self-evident, but, on the contrary, is constantly challenged, not least by the would-be elitists themselves; the gentlemen and the lady protest too much. What Girard writes about the St. Petersburg of Dostoevsky’s *Notes from the Underground*, applies also to the Hampden College of Tartt’s *The Secret History*: “All concrete difference has disappeared between the underground man and his old schoolmates; all are bureaucrats in that “artificial and studied” town [...]” (Girard 1976, 70). Replace tsarist bureaucracy with collegiate political correctness, and you’ll have a very similar meltdown of



social differences between the “Greeks” and the “Barbarians” in the story world of the more contemporary novel.

The adopting of the Ancient world-view is not a reaction to alienation from the Modern world supposedly assaulting the “Greeks” from the outside, but rather a reaction to a crisis that is already eating away at them from within. For they are as much part of this Modern world as the mass of their cheerfully mainstream-minded peers. The latter sniff cocaine and enjoy their own bacchanals of binge-drinking and promiscuous sex, only they do not need the blessing of an archaic deity for *their* “party atmosphere.” And in the end, the Classics group is equally liberal, their Dionysiac ritual eventually escaping from its ceremonial bounds. By the end of the novel, the twins have prolonged their engagement in incest, Charles is a pathological alcoholic, Henry has committed suicide and Francis has tried to, while Richard, in a somewhat less dramatic fashion, has abandoned classical philology in favour of English literature – with a telling preference for Jacobean playwrights.<sup>56</sup>

The Dionysiac orgy, itself motivated by a pursuit of difference and of transcending the crowd of common moderns, carnevalistically stages the dreaded sameness while simultaneously containing it within ritual bounds. During the festivities, the socially sanctioned restrictions concerning sex and violence are transgressed, and the culturally safeguarded differences between male and female, human and animal, and humanity and divinity, are cathartically discarded for the time being. (Cf. Girard 2005, 134-137). In *The Secret History* this means that Camilla in a rather virile fashion outruns her male peers in the woods, presumably in the guise of a deer and for the first time consummates the act of incest with her brother, while Henry insists on seeing the god Dionysus manifest his presence. Of course, the culminating transgression is the frenzied lynching, in a manner resembling *sparagmos*, of an outsider, just like in Euripides’s *The Bacchae*, Pentheus, spying on the Maenads, is torn to pieces by them. Tartt’s text intent incidentally echoes Girard who deems *The Bacchae* the most blunt and critical treatment of collective violence among the Greek tragedies<sup>57</sup>:

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<sup>56</sup> Richard’s graduate studies are a bookish way of trying to make sense of his traumatic entanglement with Henry’s tragic life that in the end transcended pure theory: “I felt [the Jacobean] cut right to the heart of the matter, to the essential rottenness of the world” (*SH*, 615).

<sup>57</sup> In *Violence and the Sacred*, Girard gives credit to Euripides for seeing what his Philhellenist commentators have failed to see, namely the brutal reality of the Dionysiac cult that has the spreading of violence as its sole function (Girard 2005, 141). However, in this book, as well as the one dedicated to Shakespeare readings (in which he calls *The Bacchae* “the most audacious of all Greek tragedies”), Girard also maintains the provisional nature of the Greek playwright’s insights as he only partially unmasks the scapegoat mechanism. Still, compared to his contemporaries, Euripides was remarkably honest in his treatment of mythologically sanctioned violence. (Girard 2005, 140-141; 2004, 223).

I thought of the *Bacchae*, a play whose violence and savagery made me uneasy, as did the sadism of its bloodthirsty god. Compared to the other tragedies which were dominated by recognizable principles of justice no matter how harsh, it was a triumph of barbarism over reason: dark, chaotic, inexplicable. (*SH*, 42-43) [...].

Uncomfortably, I thought of the *Bacchae*: hooves and bloody ribs, scraps dangling from the fir trees. There was a word for it in Greek: *omophagia*. (*SH*, 204)

The reason this particular play makes Richard uncomfortable is not that its subject matter – sacrificial violence, a staple of Ancient art and myth – differs from other well-known Greek tragedies, but rather the way this subject matter is treated more honestly by Euripides.

In his analysis of another Classical tragedy, Aeschylus's *Agamemnon* (also referenced in Tarr's novel; *SH*, 40), Gil Bailie notes that Ancient Greek literature has a tendency of last-minute self-censorship when it comes to critiquing and exposing culturally and religiously sanctioned murder and defending its victims:

The Greek tragedians caught a vivid glimpse of the sacrificial reality upon which their culture was based, but [...] they had no religiously significant prospects for ordering their lives otherwise. They were capable of artistically revealing the hidden sacrificial realities, but they knew of no alternative reality toward which to begin a journey. The revelatory power of Greek tragedy, therefore, came and went, leaving only a literary residue, and not a religious and cultural one. (Bailie 1995, 32)

Bailie compares Aeschylus's muting of the victim's literary voice for the benefit of sacrificial mythology (the word "mythology" itself deriving from "muting"; Bailie 1995, 33) to the physical gagging of Iphigenia to stifle her cries and pleas before she is ritually killed to appease the wrathful Artemis and grant Agamemnon's fleet leave to sail on to Troy (Bailie 1995, 31-33).<sup>58</sup> A similar silencing takes place in the story world of *The Secret History*, where the chicken farmer's fate is trivialized, not to mention seriously underreported by his killers. Richard, who has only heard this 'muted' version of the events, is temporarily made to regard the crime from another viewpoint, when he glances at a local newspaper story covering it less euphemistically ("[...] – the word *mutilated* had electrified me, it was the only thing I could see on the page – [...]"; *SH*, 350; italics in the original). Although failing to give voice to the victim, Francis reveals the ugliness of the murder when he tries to convince Richard as to why going to the police would be unwise: "For Christ's sake, we were wearing *bed* sheets.

<sup>58</sup> Cesáreo Bandera has reached a similar conclusion to that of Bailie concerning the provisional nature of ancient Greek ability to unmask and repudiate sacrifice. This shortcoming should, however, not detract from the partial merits of Greek and Roman texts, especially Homer and Virgil, in their recognition of the sacrificial system as problematic (Bandera 1994, 300).

Barefoot. Soaked in blood. Stinking drunk. Can you imagine if we'd trailed down to the sheriff's office and tried to explain all *that?*' (SH, 195; italics in the original).

By pointing out that the Greek students were wearing bed sheets, Francis is alluding to their home-spun equivalents of togas. But there is, I think, on the level of the implied author, an additional connotation to the characters' choice of garb, one that is supposed to summon to the reader's mind a more recent cult of American neo-pagans (and, in this case, pseudo-Christians), namely the Ku Klux Klan. The Klansmen are, after all, notorious for sewing their ceremonial robes out of sheets, and this is also a common joke made at these lofty racial supremacists' expense. The Greek students are also supremacists, though not in the racist sense of the word; they are, however, highly conscious of their educational and societal superiority in comparison to the silent majority of their college town populace. This perceived disparity between the student outsiders and the local insiders serves as an excuse for the decision not to confess their crime to the police:

'If you'd gone right in, you could've got off on some minor charge. Maybe nothing would have happened at all.'

'Maybe not,' Henry said agreeably. 'But remember, this is Vermont.'

'What the hell difference does that make?'

'It makes a great deal of difference, unfortunately. If the thing went to trial, we'd be tried here. And not, I might add, by a jury of our peers.'

'So?'

'Say what you like, but you can't convince me that a jury box of poverty-level Vermonters would have the remotest bit of pity for four college students on trial for murdering one of their neighbors.'

'People in Hampden have been hoping for years that something like this would happen,' said Francis, lighting a new cigarette off the end of the old one. 'We wouldn't be getting off on any *manslaughter* charges. We'd be lucky if we didn't get the chair.' (SH, 194-195; italics in the original)

Ironically enough, Francis, fearing the local lynching mentality, one supposedly born out of white trash class resentment towards the bookish ivory tower dwellers, will in a next breath describe the Greek students as a blood-and alcohol-drenched mob. In a typically mimetic fashion, he projects on others his own crime and his own prejudice. That Francis is heir to age-old reactionary stereotypes and the mimetic desire that infected the generations before him, is metaphorically demonstrated by the gesture of lighting a *new* cigarette off the end of the *old* one. If the 'Town' harbours any class resentment, then the 'Gown' is more than ready to accommodate it. There is no end in sight for fearful symmetry because there is no real alternative to the binary structure that merely hides the real undifferentiation of contemporary society.

Francis's description sheds light on the brutality and shabbiness of a ritual that is supposedly elevated to a sublime level by virtue of its archaic inspiration. But no matter how much the students try, they can never quite return to the 'muted' mentality of Greek tragedy, and are constantly reminded of the uneasy connection of 'good' and 'bad' violence, the way sacrifice cannot be separated from murder. That the Classics students are in a state of sacrificial crisis becomes apparent in the killing of Bunny; just like the sacrifice of the farmer was also a murder, so is the murder of Bunny a sacrifice, a scapegoating ritual that seeks to eliminate the sameness between the 'Greeks' and the 'Barbarians.' What is ironical, is, that the very need for a second murder is symptomatic of an escalation of violence and the erosion of differences that ritual sacrifice always seeks to pre-empt. What is more, Bunny's absence fails to resolve the various conflicts within the group (Francis's frustrated sexual desire for Charles, Charles's resentment of Henry who steals Camilla from him, the psychological symbiosis of the twins, Richard's bitterness towards the financial aloofness of the wealthy group, etc.), because he was not their root cause to begin with.<sup>59</sup>

The reasons for murdering Bunny are ostensibly ones of self-protection. Bunny threatens to expose the group and extorts large sums of money as a reward for his silence. But Richard admits to the audience that witness elimination is not the real motive:

Fear for our own lives might have induced us to lead him to the gallows and slip the noose around his neck, but a more urgent impetus was necessary to make us actually go ahead and kick out the chair. (*SH*, 254)

[...].

An interesting question: what was I thinking, as I watched his eyes widen with startled incredulity ("*come on, fellas, you're joking, right?*") for what would be the very last time? Not the fact that I was helping to save my friends, certainly not; nor of fear; nor guilt. But little things. Insults, innuendos, petty cruelties. The hundreds of small, unavenged humiliations which had been rising in me for months. (*SH*, 254-255; italics in the original)

This "urgent impetus" is the communal crisis within the group itself, one that reflects a similar crisis in the surrounding society at large. The 'Greeks' experience anxiety over the social and cultural proximity with the 'Barbarians,' and Bunny is the one who has one foot in the one camp and one in the other; his friends outside the Greek group include such plebeian types as the quintessential party girl Judy Poovey – with whom Richard tellingly enough is

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<sup>59</sup> The futility of sacrificing Bunny is also pointed out by Marya de Haas in a Girard-inspired book review she published in 1994 in the now terminated Dutch magazine, *Hervormd Nederland*. De Haas concludes that the most poignant evidence of an anterior crisis existing within the Classics group is the doubled relationship of the incestuous twins Charles and Camilla, as is also Henry's suicide which the murder could not stop (de Haas 1994, 31).

acquainted with – and the designated drug procurer of the college, Cloke Rayburn. Therefore he is the perfect surrogate victim, with both insider and outsider qualities. Also, his high society family is financially destitute and therefore lacks resources for any possible retaliation maneuver. After all, the group is mostly threatened from the inside, by the “unavenged” “little things” that Bunny certainly was contributing to but ones he was not solely responsible for.

The sacrificial quality of Bunny’s murder is demonstrated by the killing method in which there is only a minimal amount of touching the victim. Having been cornered on the edge of the cliff by the other Greek students, Bunny is shoved over it by Henry while the others look on. Although this quick, cool and execution-like deed seems to stand in sharp contrast with the orgiastic and explicitly religious *sparagmos* in which the Vermont chicken farmer met his end, Bunny’s murder also has definite ceremonial overtones; archaic rituals of expulsion often include the victim being shoved or chased over a cliff so as to minimize individual responsibility for the kill (cf. Girard 1987, 107-108).

The mainstream quality of Bunny is evident in the way the mass of college students mourn his death and build him up into a kind of popular culture icon – a logical next step for a sacrificial ritual, since in archaic society the victim was retrospectively divinized because of the peace his unanimous slaying brought on the community:

It was this unreality of character, this cartoonishness if you will, which was the secret of his appeal and what finally made his death so sad. Like any great comedian, he colored his environment wherever he went; in order to marvel at his constancy you wanted to see him in all sorts of alien situations: Bunny riding a camel, Bunny babysitting, Bunny in space. Now, in death, this constancy crystallized and became something else entirely: he was an old familiar jokester cast – with surprising effect – in the tragic role. (*SH*, 428)

In yet another embarrassing mirror reflection, the ‘Barbarians’ complete the unholy ritual that was left unfinished by the ‘Greeks’; they, temporarily at least, turn Bunny into a totem of their college community.<sup>60</sup> This “wanton display of grief” (*SH*, 424) appears to Richard as

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<sup>60</sup> Note Bunny’s animal nickname (his real name is Edmund). Bunny’s name is used to comical effect (a foreign teacher mistakenly refers to him as “Birdie”; *SH*, 363) to underline the unlikelihood of his ending up as a Christ-like sacrificial lamb (his murder takes place near Easter, a time for Easter bunnies as well as Christ’s Passion). Bunny’s childish and animal-like behavior – his greediness for food, low grades, laziness and all-round irresponsibility – is both contrasted with more noble and pure martyr figures and paralleled by the practice of scapegoating animals and children in archaic religion (cf. Girard 1989, 48; 2005, 150).

Like the bullied schoolboy, Piggy, in Golding’s *Lord of the Flies*, Bunny is also likened to a pig, both through casual insult (*SH*, 219) and by sacrificial identification: after Bunny’s murder, a piglet is sacrificed as his double and has its blood shed according to archaic rules of purification (*SH*, 404). In Golding’s novel, there are two scapegoats: the bullied Piggy who meets his death at the height of the boys’ rivalry and is not murdered in a

“deranged” and “strangely frantic” (ibid.), and it has the markings of an overcompensation of the ceremonial in an otherwise de-sacralized community.

That the murder of Bunny does not manage to remove the conflicts within the Greek group becomes evident in the overall meltdown of their social fibre after police and media inquiries into the death have been laid to rest. The loss of a scapegoat against whom to build a unanimous front loosens the interactive bonds between the conspirators (“[...] with Bun dead and buried, I suppose, there was much less to talk about, and no reason to stay up until four or five in the morning.”; *SH*, 479). Eventually Richard is even sickened by the idea of being “stuck” with the group he was once so eager to be part of (*SH*, 519). He also grows increasingly disgusted at the financial aloofness of the group. Richard’s moral disgust has a fair dose of personal resentment in it, as his blue-collar father was not in the habit of showering him with money and he looks to student aid rather than trust funds to pay for his tuition:

What made me angrier was that none of them seemed to care. To them, I knew, this didn’t make the slightest bit of difference. What was it to them if they had to go an extra term? What did it matter, if they failed to graduate, if they had to go back home? At least they had homes to go to. They had trust funds, allowances, dividend checks, doting grandmas, well-connected uncles, loving families. (*SH*, 583)

The irony of Richard’s grudge is that it is intensely mimetic; a great part of the fascination the Greek students held for him when he sought to enter their coveted “ranks” was their aristocratic air and an aloof stance on all things (and not just money). Richard goes to great lengths in fitting in, not only academically (by pestering Julian into excepting him in his restricted class and initially failing) but also socio-economically (claiming that his family is in the oil business, a claim that is “partly true”; *SH*, 57, as his father runs a gas station). But again, his radical difference from the others is at least partly a fantasy, since the other Greek students do not have access to the kind of family idyll Richard attributes them with; Henry and Francis have absent or aloof fathers and out-of-touch mothers, and the twins are orphans; Bunny’s family members are not without affectionate bonds, but they do not quite aspire to the façade they are at pains to hold up.

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ritual fashion, and the Christ-like Simon who becomes a sacrificial victim proper, murdered during a frenzied feast that has taken on decidedly religious overtones.

Like Tarrt’s *The Secret History*, Golding’s novel makes intertextual use of Euripides’s *The Bacchae* (cf. E.L. Epstein /cit. Golding 1982, 288; Thomas Marcellus Coskren, “Is Golding Calvinistic?”, 1963/ cit. Golding 1982, 297; Lawrence S. Friedman, *William Golding*, 1993/cit. Golding 1982, 306). Also, Tarrt’s debt to Golding has been pointed out, in passing at least (James Kaplan 2013).

Richard's hidden poverty links him with Bunny, although unlike with the latter, it manifests itself in extreme asceticism rather than incessant spending sprees on borrowed and extorted means. Also, it would appear that Richard's Fitzgeraldian estimate of the other Greek students' old money prestige is somewhat hyperbolic. In a revealing row with Henry, Charles reveals his own resentment towards the more prosperous Henry: "'*He* doesn't have to go to school,' said Charles. '*He* can do whatever he fucking pleases. He can fail every single fucking class and his dad'll still send him that fat allowance check every month –'" (*SH*, 587; italics in the original). Charles's concern with economic disparity between himself and Henry echoes both the substance and the rhetoric of Richard's earlier rant (both Richard and Charles mention checks sent by affluent relatives). And as Charles soon reveals another issue of consternation, one having to do with Henry's involvement with Camilla (*SH*, 588), it is by now clear that Charles and Richard have become doubles of each other, in addition to similarly mirroring Henry.

After witnessing Charles and Henry's verbal tug of war, one that points towards a physical showdown in the novel's action climax, Richard finds himself feeling socially shipwrecked, as he begins to feel that Henry's leadership has been challenged by Charles's usurpation attempt that replaces the apparent hierarchy of the group with a fearful symmetry of enemy brothers. This suddenly revealed tear in the Greek students' communal fibre strikes Richard with "a black, incredulous horror" (*ibid.*) that he equates with the childhood memory of witnessing his abusive father hit his mother for no reason other than feeling slighted by her remark about the more affluent neighbours – and his mother's absurd acceptance of spousal abuse:

We were utterly dependent on this man, who was not only deluded and ignorant, but incompetent. It was like walking into the cockpit of an airplane and finding the pilot and the co-pilot passed out drunk in their seats. And standing outside the Lyceum, I was struck with a black, incredulous horror, which in fact was not unlike the horror I had felt at twelve, sitting on a bar stool in our sunny little kitchen in Plano. *Who is in control here?* I thought, dismayed. *Who is flying this plane?* (*SH*, 588; italics in the original)

That Richard equates the melt-down of his family structure, his disillusionment with his abusive father as "Just Lawgiver" who strikes his wife and son "for absolutely no reason" (*ibid.*), with Charles's aggressive ascension within the Greek group is no coincidence. Though the dynamic is different (Charles and Henry are revealed as equals, whereas Richard's mother is subservient to Richard's father), the conclusion is the same: authority is arbitrary. Both

Charles and Richard's father rule with violence and intimidation, and although in the second case violence is not met with resistance, but rather, acceptance, it is violence *itself* that rules in both cases: in the rigidly patriarchal universe of "the sunny little kitchen," as well as in the chaotic meltdown between peers.<sup>61</sup> Although in the case of Richard's familial memory the patriarchal interaction between husband and wife and father and son, respectively, retains its hierarchical, Shakespearean "degree" (cf. Girard 2005, 53-54<sup>62</sup>) on the outside, there is already a crack destroying it from the inside of the disillusioned son's mind.

The ultimate failure of Bunny's murder to manage the mimetic crisis of the Greek students and pre-empt its further escalation is highlighted by the delay in the retrieval of his body and the ensuing scandal. It was intended by his murderers that the body be discovered at once and the death attributed to "a hiking accident, no more, no less" (*SH*, 1) and duly dismissed after "quiet tears and a small funeral" (*ibid.*). This tidy scenario is truncated, however, by anomalous weather:

[...] the snow that fell that night [...] covered him without a trace, and ten days later, when the thaw finally came, the state troopers and the FBI and searchers from the town all saw that they had been walking back and forth over his body until the snow above it was packed down like ice. (*SH*, 1)

The delay in the discovery of Bunny's remains complicates what was intended by the conspirators to be an open and shut case. This case of "bad luck" urges Camilla to semi-seriously recount an archaic belief about the urgency of proper burial (*SH*, 403-404; "I'm afraid that none of us are going to have a good night's sleep until Bunny's in the ground."; *SH*, 404). Because of the snow, Bunny's body actually experiences not one but two burials, and there is a mythological quality attached, albeit accidentally and intermittently, to his being covered by the snow fall that marks a sudden change in the spring weather (an April initially as warm and fresh as June suddenly resembles November; *SH*, 272; 315). In archaic society, such as the one described in Greek tragedy, a sacrificial crisis resulting from human strife is masked as being caused by an external disaster such as a natural catastrophe (Girard 2005, 87). In a more mythological age the Greek students would not have hesitated to attribute the abject weather as somehow directly related to Bunny's murder and possibly read

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<sup>61</sup> It should be elaborated that, from the point of view of the concept of the sacrificial crisis, there is a marked difference between Richard's two accounts, one about his father's exertion of violence and the other about Charles's aggression. With regard to his parents' altercation, there is no crisis of distinction in play, since the father still holds court and his patriarchal authority is not (explicitly) challenged by his wife or his son. In the case of Charles's argument with Henry, there is a challenge of authority, however, as Charles is set to dethrone Henry as the alpha male of the pact.

<sup>62</sup> The Shakespeare play in question is *Troilus and Cressida*.



it as a sign that sacrificing him has not removed the cause of conflict, after all, but as it is, they have to acknowledge, at least partially, what Richard as the least “Greek” one calls the “nonsense” (*SH*, 404) quality of such obvious superstition. But just like Camilla seems at least in part to believe in the atoning reality of being washed in the blood of the piglet, Richard also admits to feeling “tainted with a secret pollution” and is thus “superstitious” (*SH*, 405) around the bloodhounds that aid the searchers (“[...] in movies, the dog is always the first to know the suave and unsuspected vampire for what it is [...]”; *ibid.*). Henry is described as being “so superstitious that he sometimes left a saucer of milk outside his door to appease any malevolent spirits who might happen to wander by” (*SH*, 406). The fact that the police have brought a psychic along as well reveals the lingering quality of supernatural beliefs in contemporary secularism.

The issue of Bunny’s burial(s) could also be interpreted in a more explicitly Christian fashion. Like Sula’s grave in Morrison’s novel, the similar motif in *The Secret History* could be detected in the sheer recognition of the reality of the body that is being buried – as well as the live person who inhabited that body before death. Whereas in *Sula*, Nel’s sudden awareness of her friend’s unique personhood among the anonymous dwellers in the family grave marks a repudiation of the scapegoating principle and the mythological muting of the victim’s individuality, so the tragicomic treading over of Bunny’s snow-covered remains by those in search of him is a sign of sacrificial blindness. In *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World*, Girard discusses the analogy Jesus draws between the hypocritical Pharisees and underground tombs:

Luke compares the Pharisees not just to tombs but to underground tombs, that is to say invisible tombs—tombs that are perfect in a double sense, if we can put it like that, since they conceal not only death, but also their own existence as tombs

Woe unto you! For you are like graves which are not seen, and men walk over them without knowing it (Luke 11, 44). (Girard 1987, 165)

Although, in Tarrt’s novel, it is the victim who is positioned as the invisible grave, the covering of Bunny’s body points to his victimizers’ similarly “underground” character; the murderers’ identity remains hidden, and Bunny’s death is attributed to accidental (i.e., ‘natural’) causes. Ironically, the delay in the retrieval of the body serves to exacerbate the situation, since it creates more speculation about Bunny’s fate and gives rise to various conspiracy theories.

Ultimately, Bunny's being dug up from the snow by a search party demystifies his death and ruins any chance of a mythological vanishing that, by contrast, has come to characterize the actual event in the history of Bennington College (Hampden College's real-life equivalent and Tarrt's own alma mater) which involved the disappearance of a female student hiker. Bunny's temporary disappearance merely creates a collective stir, drawing in the FBI and journalists across the nation. It is this shattering of the status quo that suddenly brings together the university people and the local working class Vermonters, the regional and the national authorities, and thus inaugurates a short period of turmoil that is itself symptomatic of the crisis of distinctions that Girard would call the sacrificial crisis.

The search for Bunny and the ensuing police, media and local speculation about his fate in the interim of his disappearance and the discovery of his body, is itself a mimetic crisis in a nutshell, one that is symptomatic of contemporary culture at large. The red herrings that litter the case as it is being investigated and reported on include suspicion over Bunny's involvement in a New York drug dealing ring, his being kidnapped for ransom or fallen victim to Arab terrorists. The last detour is suggested by a local car repair shop owner who is rabidly Christian Right and anti-OPEC, and whose shouting contest with a Palestinian-American fellow guest in a television talk show represents an international mimetic crisis between the United States and the Middle East that characterizes the Reagan era in which the story is set.

The second and final burial of Bunny is for its witnesses as prosaic and bleak as the first is mysterious and suspenseful. When the body of Bunny is eventually found and laid to rest according to proper church ceremonies, Richard, as one of the guests at the funeral, is made to face the dire fact of his former friend's death:

The grave was almost unspeakably horrible. I had never seen one before. It was a barbarous thing, a blind clayey hole with folding chairs for the family teetering on one side and raw dirt heaped on the other. *My god*, I thought. I was starting to see everything, all at once, with a blistering clarity. Why bother with the coffin, the awning or any of it if they were just going to dump him, shovel the dirt in, go home? Was this all there was to it? To get rid of him like a piece of garbage? (*SH*, 472)

Staring into the grave of his own murder victim makes it painfully clear to Richard that despite the sense of adventure Julian attaches to Bunny's vanishing ("The business had upset him, that I knew, but I also knew that there was something about the operative sweep of the search which could not fail to appeal to him and that he was pleased, however obscurely, with

the aesthetics of the thing.”; *SH*, 382), there is no such romance in the bare fact of his death. There can no longer be any edifying mythology in this or any other sacrifice.<sup>63</sup>

It is also during the funeral sequence of the novel when the strong bond between Henry and Bunny is manifested in a poem recital Henry, who he is also one of Bunny’s pallbearers, performs as a eulogy, and the palpability of his constant discomfort during the funeral as he tries to numb his very possibly psychosomatic headaches with pills and alcohol while still maintaining a stoically heroic façade. In an even more theatrical flourish, Henry smears his shirt front with dirt from Bunny’s grave site, making it clear to the secular Christian attendants that his ‘dust to dust, ashes to ashes’ gesture is not mere lip service but carries truly archaic, as well as pronouncedly pagan, significance. Although Richard characterizes Henry’s strange ritual as having been carried out “with a drugged, fathomless calm” and “with terrible composure” (*SH*, 474), the reader is left to wonder whether Henry’s behaviour truly is motivated by singular piety and whether he is as unknowing of the others’ bafflement as he appears to be.

Henry’s identification with Bunny, no matter how condescending, is nonetheless telling in the light of Henry’s leadership status in the Classics group. Prior to his death, Bunny has played ‘the king of fools’ or the “mock king” (Frazer 1994, Volume I, 226) to Henry’s rightful king, a surrogate victim for the real thing (cf. e.g., Girard 2005, 128; Frazer 1994, Volume I, 226-228). The showering of money and special favours (as in the case of Henry taking Bunny to a luxurious holiday in Rome or Camilla ironing Bunny’s shirts) and tolerating verbal and psychological abuse (as in the scene where Bunny encourages Richard to tell more lies about his elitist background in order to expose him as a hoax in front of the others) serve as what Girard would call the “sacral privileges” granted to a false king before he is sacrificed for the benefit of the true king and his community of onlookers (cf. Girard 2005, 128). Bunny’s jokester qualities are pitted against Henry’s regal ones by Richard who compares the group to a pack of cards, with Bunny as Joker, Henry as “dark King,” Camilla as “the Queen,” while Charles, Francis and Richard himself are likened to “dark Jacks” (*SH*, 252). The card metaphor also serves to point the game-like existence of the group whose characteristic social action is that of *play*: play-acting their chosen identities (the ‘Greeks’ as opposed to the ‘Barbarians’ around them) and toying with moral categories and consequently with real lives.

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<sup>63</sup> Richard’s contemplation of Bunny’s grave in Tarrt’s *The Secret History* resembles Nel’s sobering visit to Sula’s burial site in Morrison’s *Sula*, only the disillusionment concerning the hypocrisy of entombment (cf. Bailie 1995, 228) is even more visceral in Tarrt, since the actual process of the burial is laid bare in Richard’s eyes, whereas Nel was absent from Sula’s funeral.

In Bunny's absence, the character who comes to embody the sacrificial crisis that really has no one instigator is not the passive Richard or the mastermind Henry, but the increasingly withdrawn and erratic Charles. It is in Charles's 'loose cannon' persona that the dreaded loss of differences is condensed and boils over, leading up to the climactic scene at the Albemarle hotel. Charles's 'mimetic' characteristics therefore warrant closer inspection.

Charles is a twin of a female sibling, a fact which blurs the gender distinction, Charles being slightly effeminate and Camilla masculine; as incestuous twins, both transgress the most sacred of taboos, ones having to do with the protection of procreation and individuation and the prevention of symmetrical rivalry and violence (cf. Girard 2005, 59-61). It is also important to note, that although Camilla in part reciprocates her brother's incestuous desire, she eventually wants to break free from it, causing Charles to turn violent and coercive, having already in the past demonstrated jealousy towards all other male members of the group, ironically, more so towards the homosexual Francis than the heterosexual Bunny (*SH*, 516-517).

Charles is even more 'doubled' than his twin sister; an occasional bed mate of Francis, he is the only bisexual member of the group. In addition to his sexual and gender ambivalence, Charles blurs the boundaries between adulthood and childhood (he wants to be reassured like a child; *SH*, 593 and spends one night curled up inside a tunnel of a children's playground; *SH*, 531), animal and human (he is intensely fond of stray dogs and cats; *SH*, 94; 592; the playground tunnel he sleeps in is the giant shape of a snail; *SH*, 531), as well as health and sickness (he becomes seriously alcoholic by the end of the novel, a fact that renders him both physically weak and psychologically erratic).

Concerning the relationship Richard has with Charles, it could be argued that the latter functions as yet one more double for the former; if Henry is Richard's aspiration figure, and Bunny is his substitute figure, then Charles is something of a wish-fulfilment figure in that he openly acts on the two convergent desires that in Richard lie dormant, namely an antagonism towards Henry and a sexual longing for Camilla. Richard's uncanny bond with Charles is further implied by a dream he has about travelling together with Charles on a train that also has other, more mainstream students in it (*SH*, 323); it turns out that the same night, the one following Bunny's murder, Charles has dreamt of Richard, as well (*SH*, 326). Also, Francis makes a pass at Richard whose unresponsiveness is not all that different from Charles's passive acquiescence; *SH*, 325; 516). It is Charles who, albeit in a drunken and psychotic stupor, dares to challenge Henry's position as the leader of the Greek students' coterie, just like in archaic communities the inevitable regicide of the ostensibly waning king was

sometimes speeded up by a usurper who challenged him to a duel. Faced by what he sees as a dead end, however, Henry beats the gun-toting Charles to it and shoots himself, effectively salvaging the remnants of his ‘metaphysical’ authority. Henry’s maintaining his regal status beyond the grave is ironically consistent with the logic of archaic regicide, in which the slain king, and not the victorious challenger, is deified as someone who has permanently entered the realm of the sacred (cf. Girard 1987, 65-66). Also, in some communities, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa, the king is asked by his people to kill himself if his reign is considered a failure (Turnbull 1976, 138). Even though it is left open to what extent Henry’s “noble gesture” constitutes a recognition of failure on his part, he still strives to maintain a sense of autonomy by refusing to negotiate with his antagonists.

From the point of view of the sacrificial crisis, it is therefore not surprising, that it is Charles who ignites the fatal feud at the Albemarle hotel that leaves Henry dead by suicide and Richard wounded from a stray bullet. This last incident of bloodshed makes it clear that, in the story world of *The Secret History*, even the most passive bystander cannot hope to escape mimetic contagion with its ensuing escalation of reciprocal violence.

#### **4.4 Fratricide and Regicide: Apocalyptic History and the Levelling of Hierarchies in Ian McEwan’s *Amsterdam***

If Greek tragedy is an essential reference point in Tarrt’s *The Secret History*, then Shakespeare plays a similarly important intertextual role in McEwan’s *Amsterdam*. The novel explicitly mentions the character of Cassius from *Julius Caesar*, and the plot structure is to a certain degree analogous to this famous drama of regicide.<sup>64</sup>

Even though sacrificial dynamics cannot be reduced to any one person, since communal crisis naturally takes two and more, certain individuals can become instrumental in spreading the germs that eventually grow into a scapegoating organism. In the tragedy of *Julius Caesar* this individual is Cassius. In his book-length study of Shakespeare, Girard calls the character of Cassius (and not, for example, Brutus) the “real father” of the conspiracy against Caesar, because Cassius is “[t]he mediator of hatred” in Shakespeare’s play:

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<sup>64</sup> In addition to McEwan’s novel, also Spark’s texts alludes to *Julius Caesar*; Miss Brodie is reported to have a “Roman profile” (*PMJB*, 9); also, she is explicitly compared with the figure of Caesar (*PMJB*, 9; cf. Auerbach 1978, 171). The novel’s Shakespearean motif of usurpation is anticipated by the narrator’s comment (referencing the Brodie girls’ viewpoint): “As soon expect Julius Caesar to apply for a job at a crank school as Miss Brodie. She would never resign. If the authorities wanted to get rid of her she would have to be assassinated” (*PMJB*, 9).

The conspiracy originates in the envious soul of Cassius. This envy is confirmed by Caesar himself, who characterizes the man as a tortured intellectual unable to enjoy sensuous pleasures. Unlike his modern posterity, this early prototype of *ressentiment* – Nietzsche’s word for mimetic envy – has not yet lost all capacity for bold action, but excels only in the clandestine and terroristic type exemplified by the conspiracy. (Girard 2004, 187)

Vernon’s speculation concerning Frank Dibben’s private life in *Amsterdam*, expressed in free indirect discourse, echoes Caesar’s dramatic speech judging Cassius in *Julius Caesar* (1.2.191-209) when the editor notes that his junior colleague has little else than his ambition to keep him company (“[...] Vernon imagined a bedsit or studio flat, and no one there, no girl waiting for the deputy foreign editor to come home.”; *A*, 107). Even before his professional scapegoating materializes and marks him as the Caesar of this tragedy – one staged in a late 1990’s London newsroom instead of the Roman senate – Vernon anticipates the eruption of rivalry brewing in his journalistic court; why else compare Dibben explicitly with Cassius if not for the same “hunger” that the young careerist shares with his Shakespearean counterpart (*A*, 39; 105)? Like Cassius, Dibben is the instigator of the conspiracy to commit regicide, although, belonging in the Post-Nietzschean school of *ressentiment*, Vernon’s usurper is not a real murderer like Cassius, Brutus et al. Ironically enough, in the end of the novel, Vernon will be just that, as well as a murder victim. It is his own mimetic desire, his urge to revenge Clive, which turns him into a literal corpse, and not just a symbolic victim or a professional has-been.

In fact, Vernon is both Caesar and Brutus, since like the latter, he has his mimetic appetite “whetted” (*Julius Caesar*, 2.1.61) by Dibben-as-Cassius (as well as by George Lane) and is seduced into conspiring against an altogether different Caesar, the Foreign Secretary Garmony. And just like Brutus, he fails to win the support of the public for his rescue plan to rid the country of a future despot (i.e., shame Garmony into stepping out of the race for Prime Minister’s office). The scandal-stirring scoop backfires, thanks to the clever rhetoric of Garmony’s wife Rose, the Mark Antony figure of McEwan’s take on Shakespeare.

Garmony’s ‘murder’ thus is a symbolic one, as his aspirations for the prime ministry are truncated. Vernon also survives *physically* intact (for the time being, at least), but the logic of regicide that his firing follows is otherwise consistent with the bloodier scapegoating rituals of a more archaic age.

Yet another king figure, albeit one who escapes regicide, is Molly’s jealously possessive widower, George Lane. George’s Shakespearean wariness of would-be usurpers of Molly’s memory first becomes evident in the cremation ceremony sequence that opens McEwan’s

novel. At that point the burden of character focalization rests on Clive and Vernon, but it is later confirmed that the two men have indeed correctly analyzed the third man's mental processes, even though their own attitudes are no different. As is sometimes characteristic of mimetic rivalry, the rival may be remarkably lucid about his own desire, and yet remain caught in the conflictual symmetry. Of the central characters of *Amsterdam*, Clive is able to recognize his jealousy of Molly, but is unable to rid himself of the tendency to scapegoat George: "He felt himself to be the only one who really missed Molly. Perhaps if he'd married her he would have been worse than George and wouldn't even have tolerated this gathering" (*A*, 11). So even though Clive admits to a symmetry between the desire for the object (Molly) between himself and his rival (George), he simultaneously insists on an asymmetry between the intensity of that desire, boasting of the hyperbolic measures of his jealousy as opposed to that experienced by George who is the one lover of Molly to have marital legitimacy on his side.

The cremation ceremony sequence in McEwan's *Amsterdam* parallels the funeral sequence of Tarr's *The Secret History* (discussed in chapter two), in that they both unmask a sacrificial crisis brewing beneath the calm surface of ritual reticence. A large number of the guests attending are Molly's one-time lovers, a fact George is painfully aware of. Nevertheless, the widower and his rivals pride themselves for maintaining a polite exterior and keeping the crisis in check (e.g., "Clive was gripping George's hand in a reasonable display of sincerity."; *A*, 9). Still, there are cracks in the facade, as is demonstrated by Clive's turning a pleasant exchange with Hart Pullman, who is a fellow funeral guest – and a self-proclaimed sexual rival –, into an insult. Clive calls Pullman, the American "Beat poet," a "lying reptile" under his breath (*A*, 10-11). It is telling, however, that the two men have collaborated on a work of art (Clive setting Pullman's poems to music) without any *professional* rivalry, but that the appearance of a converging desire over Molly, a *sexual* object, one that cannot be shared, stirs up a wave of mimetic resentment.

Despite these small tares in the social fibre, the cremation ceremony sequence marks one of the final harmonious meetings between Clive and Vernon before they fatally fall out over the Garmony scandal. During the ceremony, Garmony too is at the receiving end of Clive's expressions of resentment, as Clive shares Vernon's ostensibly political dislike of the Foreign Secretary. Clive embarrasses Garmony in front of the press by reminding him of the story published by Vernon's paper according to which the reactionary politician as a young man advocated a death sentence for Nelson Mandela (*A*, 15-16). Clive is silenced only when, under his breath, Garmony threatens to ridicule his accuser in turn:

‘The very last time I saw Molly she told me you were impotent and always had been.’

‘Complete nonsense. She never said that.’

‘Of course you’re bound to deny it. Thing is, we could discuss it out loud in front of the gentlemen over there, or you could get off my case and make a pleasant farewell. That is to say, fuck off.’ (A, 16)

Garmony thus gives Clive a dose of his own medicine, and like Clive does with Pullman, Garmony also invokes Molly’s posthumous aid in making his case. In effect, the resentful rivalry between the “key male[s]” (A, 5) attending their dead lover’s cremation is revealed as fearfully symmetrical. Not only does the first chapter point towards another funerary rite anticipated in the final chapter, namely the long-delayed memorial service for Molly to be organised by George who in the end manages to rid himself of the symbolical competition represented by Clive, Vernon and Garmony, but the introductory sequence also contains in a nutshell the mimetic logic which soon destroys Clive and Vernon’s friendship and results in their mutual and very physical destruction. In this apocalyptic light, the words with which Garmony dismisses the journalists witnessing his muted exchange with Clive without actually hearing its content, ring not only with comic, but also tragic, irony: “‘To air differences and remain friends, the essence of civilised existence, don’t you think?’” (A, 17).

Despite the external differences in their professions (Clive works in the private, individual and creative realm of composing music, whereas Vernon’s job description as a newspaper editor is more public, politically motivated and supported by a team effort on behalf of the other lower-ranking journalists), the psychological and moral mechanisms underlying the careers of the two men are remarkably similar. This symmetry is demonstrated by the arguments they have with each other, as well as the excuses they employ to defend their secretly selfish motives that in turn cater to their grandiose ambitions. For example, while Clive accuses Vernon of political opportunism and Vernon blames Clive of ivory tower aloofness (A, 73-74), both are driven by similar delusions of personal grandeur.

The parallels between both main characters’ mental processes are highlighted by the novel’s structure, which often alternates between one chapter focusing on Clive and another focusing on Vernon. The narrative form reflects the narrative content and helps demonstrate how, despite external differences, there are internal symmetries between the situations of the two men.

These parallel reflections not only convey the self-centredness of the two characters, but they also reveal how their megalomania is linked with paranoia; Clive and Vernon are



incapable of contemplating their own success without projecting enmity on others who supposedly (and as it turns out, also at times actually) plot their downfall. This mimetic suspicion is at first centred on colleagues and professional rivals (other composers and journalists), but after the fatal argument, the two friends begin to consider each other as would-be usurpers of, in lack of a professional object of rivalry, the recently deceased Molly's legacy.

Faithfulness to Molly's memory is especially pertinent when it comes to Vernon's decision about the publication of the Garmony photographs, as it is safe to assume Molly took the pictures as a therapeutic favour to Garmony and allowed them to fall into George's hands only because of her debilitating sickness. But Molly also haunts Clive in his moment of transgression, as the hiker he fails to rescue from an attempted rape bears a physical resemblance to Molly – who in all probability would have been dismayed by Clive's lack of chivalry.

The individual moral failings of Clive and Vernon are linked with their respective communities. The social agent that initiates the crisis in *Amsterdam* is the media. It is not, however, solely responsible, but its agency is rather symptomatic of a larger societal meltdown. And even though Clive is quick to judge Vernon's opportunistic yellow journalism, there is no more integrity in the apolitical arts industry he himself occupies. Not only is the music community infiltrated by conductors who hire women musicians for sex appeal rather than talent and critics who lead double lives as paedophiles (*A*, 161; 164-165), but the very *communality* of the community is permeated by suspicion and fear of ridicule. Clive is careful to distinguish himself from the resenting crowd of peers not realising that he is equally resentful of them; as is characteristic of mimetic desire, the subject is adept at unmasking his own desire in others. For Clive, there is no shortage of would-be obstacles lying in wait to assail his superior genius. Avangarde "zealots" think his popular appeal makes him a sell-out (*A*, 22), the press either loves or loathes his work with no middle ground in sight (*A*, 23), and one particularly resentful critic is quick to turn a compliment into a belated insult ("[...] that little shit Paul Lanark [...] had pronounced Clive the thinking man's Gorecki, then later publicly recanted: Gorecki was the thinking man's Linley."; *A*, 163).

Initially convinced that his newly finished symphony will be a success – on hearing it performed, he has second thoughts – Clive permits himself to relinquish any false modesty that might linger after the creative feat:

A genius. Though he sounded it guiltily on his inner ear, he would not let the word reach his lips. He was not a vain man. A genius. It was a term that had suffered from inflationary over-use, but surely there was a certain level of achievement, a gold standard, that was non-negotiable, beyond mere opinion. There hadn't been many. Among his countrymen, Shakespeare was a genius, of course, and Darwin and Newton, he had heard it said. Purcell, almost. Britten, less so, though within range. But there had been no Beethovens here. (*A*, 133)

Similarly, Vernon oscillates between self-congratulation and paranoia. With the Garmony scoop pending,

[...] Vernon was himself again, large, benign, ruthless and good. Where others would have felt a weight upon their shoulders, he felt an enabling lightness, or indeed a light, a glow of competence and well-being, for his sure hands were about to cut away a cancer from the organs of the body politic – this was the image he intended to use in the leader that would follow Garmony's resignation. Hypocrisy would be exposed, the country would stay in Europe, capital punishment and compulsory conscription would remain a crank's dream, social welfare would survive in some form or other, the global environment would get a decent chance, and Vernon was on the point of breaking into song. (*A*, 111)

What further highlights the ironic mixing of Clive and Vernon's grandiose fantasies is that each man steps into the field of expertise of the other – music and politics, respectively; Clive contemplates his place in British society (albeit the part of society reserved for geniuses), while Vernon sees himself as something of an operatic hero about to burst into song.

These symmetrical passages of self-congratulation also reveal how a sense of achievement is inextricably linked to the possibility of threat posed by others. And true enough, the sense of elation is short-lived in both cases; the public sympathy turning against him, Vernon is fired, and Clive's composition is posthumously likened to a Beethoven plagiarism.

The contrasts apparent in the shuffling of perspectives between the two main characters are synthesized in the conversations Clive and Vernon engage in. The heated and mutually accusatory tone of these debates parallels the verbal duelling characteristic of Greek tragedy, in which "hot words are substituted for cold steel" (Girard 2005, 47). And as is the case with physical violence, also a verbal rivalry reveals the sameness underlying ostensible difference.

The fatal feud between Clive and Vernon is ignited during one such verbal dispute. However, it should be noted, that the rivalry has not yet escalated to a point where "all restraints are off" (*A*, 119; see chapter 2.2.), as there is still an object in sight, namely the social and political context and opinions thereof. Nevertheless, Vernon is quickly losing sight of what little ideological integrity he has had before, and Clive, after his resentment of

Vernon is fused with his personal embarrassment due to his moral failure in connection with the Lake District incident, is equally quick to “turn” the fatal “corner” (*A*, 119). Clive claims that if the cross-dresser was anyone else except Garmony Vernon would support the vindication of his marginalized gender identity, whereas Vernon blames Clive for disinterested elitism in the face of pragmatist if brutal engagement (You’re in your studio all day dreaming of symphonies. You’ve no idea what’s at stake.”; *A*, 73), to which Clive retorts that it is all well and good for Vernon to criticize his host while drinking wine that cost Clive “[a] hundred and five pounds a bottle” (*A*, 74). This kind of verbal fencing plays like an ominous prelude to the more fatal tit-for-tat looming in the novel’s deadly climax.

When meeting *moral* resistance from his friend despite having taken his *political* agreement for granted, Vernon turns on Clive and paints him as an embodiment of the kind of social aloofness he despises. Thus, Vernon has evoked the *personal* dimension of the debate, after which the two other dimensions (the political and the moral) have been sidelined in favour of this third one. That Clive is quick to point out Vernon’s own hypocrisy (namely, that he is partaking in the elitism he so vehemently attacks), is already a clear indicator of subjectivity having taken over.

There is one difference in Vernon’s situation that separates him from Clive, and that is his status as a collective scapegoat, already *before* actual death. It is no coincidence that it is the newsroom and not the concert hall that is the stage for an equivalent of *Julius Caesar* with its motif of regicide. For one thing, the editor has several underlings one of which is the usurping Cassius to his “empire.” Secondly, journalism is a more integral part of the political dimension of society than music and other art media could ever hope to be; indeed, journalism does not merely observe the political scene but plays an active a role in it.<sup>65</sup>

Vernon plans to scapegoat Garmony to increase his paper’s circulation by creating a public outrage that converges on one victim. But as lynching mentality is always quick to change target, he finds himself the ultimate victim. Garmony’s wife plays the victim card and manages to scapegoat Vernon for his scapegoating. This turn of events is symptomatic of a historical change diagnosed by Girard; the Judeo-Christian sensitivity to victimhood has rendered the archaic surrogate victim mechanism obsolete. What has taken its place, however, is a sacrificial mechanism in reverse that victimizes victimizers (e.g., Girard 2001, 176).

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<sup>65</sup> It is interesting that even though, in this collective dimension at least, Clive is not turned into an exact replica of Vernon, although he is in a way scapegoated as a plagiarist in his own, more restricted community, his music nevertheless indicates a sacrificial crisis in that it is undifferentiated, or as Clive himself puts it, “*fatally unvaried*” (*A*, 159; italics in the original). The lack of variation in musical instrumentation could be considered reminiscent of a social melt-down in human society (“Practically every instrument was playing the same note.”; *A*, 160).

However, even this modern substitute mechanism cannot forestall the escalation of violence which is demonstrated by the reciprocal destruction of Clive and Vernon as doubles.

The rapidity with which mimetic extremes widen is also important to the collective background against which Clive and Vernon's rivalry develops. *Amsterdam* may be less focused on the progress of historical time than the other four novels studied (*The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* and *Sula*, especially), but it is still no less concerned with history.

Although *Amsterdam* does not in any direct way concern itself with such historical crises as the Holocaust (cf. *What I Loved*), the rise and fall of Fascism (cf. *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*), or the slow erosion of racial segregation in the United States (cf. *Sula*), it could be argued that McEwan's novel is saturated by a history, and that of all the novels studied here it is the most *apocalyptic* – at least in the sense meant by Girard's mimetic theory.

First, it must be clarified how the apocalypse is understood by mimetic theory as opposed to some of the more conventional eschatological schools of thought. As Robert Doran writes in his article, "Rene Girard's apocalyptic modernity" (2011), Girard does not regard 'the apocalypse' as a fire and brimstone variety of Doomsday prophecy come true, but rather stresses the immanent and very human logic of a collective sacrificial crisis boiling over as social history unravels (cf. Doran 2011, 38-39). History, itself brought about by Jewish and Christian conceptions of time as something linear and dynamic,<sup>66</sup> is at a point of acceleration, since for the first time mimetic conflict has (almost completely) severed its sacrificial binds with nothing preventing it from erupting "on a planetary scale" (Girard / cit. Tinq 2012).

Girard's eschatology is inseparable from his theory of rivalry, be it collective or dyadic. Whereas Clausewitz in *On War* (1832) distinguished the gentlemanly war between professional soldiers – one important incidence of which was the duel – from 'total war' with its mass conscriptions and civilian casualties, Girard sees the transition from the first to the second as a logical continuum. The duel, ideally contained in the fight between two men, is already an indicator of a "trend to extremes" (Girard 2010, 5), and as such inherently apocalyptic (cf. also Doran 2011, 46<sup>67</sup>):

<sup>66</sup> A case for Christianity's bringing history into being is made by the Catholic theologian Henri de Lubac: "Christianity is not one of the great things of history, it is history that is one of the great things of Christianity" (Lubac, Henri de. 1987. *Paradoxes of Faith*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press. / cit. Bailie 1995, 14). De Lubac's insight is in accordance with Girard's idea of Christianity working *against mythology*, and thus inherently *with history*.

<sup>67</sup> Doran sums up Girard by pointing out that "To think war according to a logic of extremes is ipso facto to engage in apocalyptic thinking" (Doran 2011, 46). Although there is no actual collective war involving the two individual main characters of *Amsterdam*, the germ of any war could be said to spawn from individual conflicts. Individual characters can of course also function as symbols of collective entities such as states. However, as I hope to demonstrate, the character conflicts in McEwan's novel do not so much stand in for conflicts *between* communities as they do for conflicts *within* one community, a global one.

[...] [Clausewitz's] striking definition of a duel as a "trend to extremes" [...] immediately suggested to me what I call mimetic conflict. [...]. I have to admit that his definition of a duel both fascinates and frightens me because it is consistent with my analyses and applies them to history with a force that I had not imagined. (Girard 2010, 5)

Girard's engagement with Clausewitz produced a study of "the *possibility* of an end to Europe, the Western world and the world as a whole" (Girard 2010, ix; italics in the original). How, then, is a private feud between two individuals, no matter how fatal in the end, a sign of an apocalyptic dimension in *Amsterdam*? The eponymous Dutch capital could be perceived as a microcosm of such a *possibility* of a *collective* end, having in the story been staged as an *actual* end on the level of *individuals*.

In *Battling to the End* (2010, French orig. 2007), Girard's interviewer, Benoît Chantre, quotes Clausewitz: "War is nothing but a duel on a larger scale" (Clausewitz 1.1.2, 75<sup>68</sup>/cit. Girard 2010, 1; 4). Conversely, in McEwan's *Amsterdam*, the 'duel' waged between Clive and Vernon is symptomatic of 'war' being waged in the world around them. This war is no longer the Cold War and not yet the War on Terror, but it is nevertheless a collective eruption of various small duels just like the one that so fatally assures the two main characters' mutual destruction.<sup>69</sup>

In Clive and Vernon's case, the ritual of the duel undergoes a sacrificial crisis, in that there is no winner, no Romulus to his Remus, but rather absolute reciprocity, an Eteocles meeting his Polyneices. One could argue, that the novel's euthanasia pact is also successfully sacrificial, since the violence is contained between the two enemies instead of snowballing into their community at large. This is true, and as pointed out before, George Lane remains standing as a kind of contemporary high priest over the corpses of his rivals. However, there will be other rivals and other 'duels' the outcome of which is bound to destabilize the sacrificial status quo in the long run. And perhaps the run is not so long after all.

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<sup>68</sup> Clausewitz, Carl von. 1984 [1973]. *On War [Vom Kriege]*. Edited and Translated by Michael Howard and Peter Paret. Princeton: Princeton University Press. The original German version cited by Girard was published in 1973 by Dummler in Bonn.

<sup>69</sup> McEwan has been quite explicit in his apocalyptic concerns in a work preceding *Amsterdam* by more than a decade, namely his libretto for an oratorio composed by Michael Berkeley, *or Shall We Die?* (1983). This text deals with nuclear disaster and echoes the concerns raised by the renewed virility of the arms race in the era of Reagan's 'Star Wars' programme.

#### 4.5 The Fine Art of Murder: The Crisis of Distinctions in the ‘Cultured’ Community of Siri Hustvedt’s *What I Loved*

In McEwan’s *Amsterdam*, the two main characters move from thoughts to deeds and end their lives in the hands of the proxy killers they have hired for each other’s benefit. In Tarrt’s *The Secret History*, the murder-plotting narrator admits that “*What is unthinkable is undoable*” (SH, 311; italics in the original). In Morrison’s *Sula*, a quiet and conventional woman comes to realize that by passively witnessing acts of neglect and abuse she has participated in committing them, if only in spirit. In Spark’s *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, a fanatical teacher causes her pupil to perish in a war she has verbally propagated while remaining completely aloof in the face of its harsh reality.

In all of the above-mentioned cases, between the contemplation of a deplorable outcome or status quo and the actualization thereof, lies desire. This desire might take the one of the extreme forms of either highly initiative action (*Amsterdam*) or failure to change one’s thought patterns and emotional attitudes until it is too late to change the course of events (*Sula*); or it might be involvement in a group action in which one’s own initiative, apart from agreement, is limited (*The Secret History*); or the disaster might be brought about by loudly and enthusiastically over-emphasizing theory while remaining ignorant of the practical implementation of that theory (*The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*). Nevertheless, in all texts, thinking and doing are presented to the reader as interrelated rather than separate. Also, the desire to act is almost tantamount to action itself.

Desire, however, can also be fought, and if the fight is successful, the deplorable outcome of desire can be evaded or pre-empted. This, I would argue, is the case in the ‘mimetic’ narrative of the fifth novel studied in this thesis, Siri Hustvedt’s *What I Loved*. In Hustvedt’s novel, the mimetic desire experienced by the main character Leo towards his best friend and artistic idol, Bill, is successfully subverted before it has a chance to manifest in a violent form. This is because both Leo and Bill engage in introspection and recognize their rivalrous potential in time, whereas other characters in the novel are not as fortunate. These less introspective characters give way to their mimetic resentment and end up committing acts of betrayal, verbal and mental abuse, and ultimately physical violence. It is especially the *folie à deux* kind of relationship, a veritable partnership in crime, between Bill’s artistic rival Teddy Giles and Bill’s son Mark that is presented to the reader as the mirror image opposite to Leo and Bill’s inherently benign interaction. Thus, in the novel’s social context of the late twentieth-century New York art world, the pairs of Leo and Bill, and Mark and Giles,

respectively, come to represent the positive and the negative dimension of imitative desire. Furthermore, a similar contrast in relationships is to be detected in the way not only artists (Bill and Giles), but also art critics function; Leo, as an art historian in general and Bill's atelier critic in particular, engages in constructive criticism that at least strives to retain its objectivity and separate the artist's persona from his or her works, whereas a critic called Henry Hasseborg writes reviews that are deliberately resentful and scandal-mongering.

The role art plays in this 'artist novel' by Hustvedt is strongly related to the question of desire, as well as to violence. The connection between art, imitation and violence is of course nothing new. However, a purely representational view of mimesis – which is more Platonic or Auerbachian than Girardian – is sadly limited, since it often fails to elaborate on the acquisitive aspect of media mediation that it either neglects or takes for granted.<sup>70</sup> In *The Aesthetics of Murder* (1991), the literary scholar Joel Black manages to bridge the gap between *representing* violence in literature or the (audio)visual arts and *engaging in* "aesthetic" acts of violence.

Black quotes Brutus's musings in *Julius Caesar* when the would-be assassin contemplates the dream-like state between the *thought* of murder and the *act* of murder: "Between the acting of a dreadful thing / And the first motion, all the interim is / Like a hideous dream" (Black 1991, 18). Art seems itself to correspond with the "phantasma"-like "interim" (*Julius Caesar*, 2.1.64-65) that connects action with contemplation. Art, of course, is not synonymous with dream, fantasy or intention, but in a simulated way, it can treat these preoccupations and present a *mise en abyme* reflection of the actual world (which in this case of literary analysis is the textual actual world). Also, artworks, when treated as the simulations and mediations that they are (as opposed to simulacra and substitutes for real people, as was shown in the motif of the "magical portrait" discussed in chapter 3.3.), can function as reminders of the *objective* truths that have been clouded by the *subjective* projections characteristic of rivalry.

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<sup>70</sup> In the epilogue of his celebrated *Mimesis*, Auerbach summarizes both his own and Plato's meaning of the word when he writes: "The subject of this book, the interpretation of reality through literary representation or 'imitation', has occupied me for a long time. My original starting point was Plato's discussion in book 10 of the *Republic*—mimesis ranking third after truth—in conjunction with Dante's assertion that in the *Commedia* he presented true reality" (Auerbach 1968, 554). Indeed, the subtitle of the work states the same delineation: "*The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*." Although Girard has found both Plato and Dante worthy of his comment, it is quite obvious that what Auerbach means by "imitation" is not exactly what mimetic theory entails, since it treats representation as merely one dimension of mimesis. Girard himself says as much, although he also gives credit to Auerbach's insight about the interconnections between literary realism and Christianity, while lamenting the fact that Auerbach does not push his findings further in the anthropological direction and makes nothing of the different ways in which Homer and *The Bible* deal with victims of violence. (Cf. Girard 2007, 180-181; 208-209).

The following subchapter 4.4. will engage in a reading of Hustvedt's *What I Loved* and analyze the role sacrificial violence plays in the New York art world setting of the novel, and how artworks mirror the mimetic desire experienced by its characters and manifested in both their thoughts and actions in a social context. I will then move on to discuss the two other social and cultural dimensions essential to the novel: food (especially in the context of eating disorders and their 'mimetic' causes), and crime (in connection to which, mimetic violence is most explicitly at work). All three aspects of *What I Loved* are interrelated, and they reveal a mimetic crisis underlying the highly intellectualized and media-mediated interactions in the Western art world of the 1980's and 1990's.

### **Art as an Agent and Detector of Mimetic Desire**

Leo, the narrator and main character of *What I Loved*, is an art history professor at Columbia University and thus a seasoned (as well as licensed) gazer. Leo sees in Bill's artworks the fictional reality that on an actual level consists either in affects of the past or as of yet unrealized possibilities for the future. For Leo, experiencing the past consists, for example, of the shock of his son Matthew's death and his hazy recollections of an early childhood escape from Hitler's Germany where a part of his family perished. Moreover, contemplating his possible future, Leo is forced to face his unfulfilled desire for Bill's second wife Violet, as well as his envy of Bill that for a long time goes unrecognized.

The drama of Leo's mimetic relationship with Bill and his family is played against the collective backdrop in which the story takes place. Bill's reception in the art community, first of New York, then of the world, is subject to change according to the shifting aesthetic and ideological trends. In this stormy dialectics, Leo's role is mainly supportive, as he becomes Bill's atelier critic. When reception of Bill's works is merely negligent (e.g., when his narratively intricate and psychologically complex approach cannot compete with his nemesis Teddy Giles's more visceral and iconoclastic, if not pornographic, strategies) or downright unjust (when one resentful critic, Henry Hasseborg, embarks on a smear campaign against what he perceives as political incorrectness showcased in Bill's unflattering sculpture of a woman figure), Leo is only too happy to take the side of his best friend *contra mundum*. Leo's mimetic attachment to Bill is an important ingredient of his critical and theoretical bias, and while standing up to his friend and preferred artist, he has yet to recognize the envy that goes with his admiration and solidarity. And although the text provides the reader with strong



indications as to the moral and aesthetic superiority of Bill's works over those of Giles, he or she remains grounded in Leo's point of view – and not that of Hasseborg.

Bill's career, the dramatic ups and downs of which Leo is allowed to follow from a front row seat, as it were, is characterized by periods of mass appeal, outrageous polemic, cool indifference and a consistent but restricted cult following; he also appears to enjoy a more tenuous and mature appreciation in Europe than in America, the latter being more vulnerable to ideologically charged debates that cool down as quickly as they heat up. It is in this context of oscillating media biases that the role of the hostile art critic Hasseborg is highlighted. This role is nothing short of demoniacal, and it could be argued that the verbally abusive Hasseborg, like his artist protégé, the murderous Teddy Giles, is something of a Satan figure in Hustvedt's novel.

In contrast to the Hasseborg-Giles partnership and much to Leo's admiration, Bill is able to retain his creative integrity and no-nonsense work ethic in the face of the media frenzy surrounding his and other New York artists' public image. But however incorruptible in matters of public taste, Bill does manage to acquire a "name" for himself, thus becoming an (initially) unwilling accomplice to the art world's mimetic conspiracies. As Leo points out, the art community runs on what Girard would call metaphysical desire, as the almost hysterically instantaneous bestowal of prestige attributed to the artist's identity transcends his concrete output in art objects ("The object merely trails after the name as its solid proof. Of course, the artist himself or herself has little to do with any of it."; *WIL*, 70). Bill is not invulnerable to this "mental heat" that manifests the "psychological climate" (*ibid.*) of the art market. But he manages not to lose his sight over his objects – objects that end up dealing with the same mimetic laws that govern their reception and exchange in the art world.

This world has its fair share of Satanic princes who, like their Biblical counterparts, thrive on scandals they themselves help to create. Teddy Giles, the artist-criminal hyped for his 'murder art' and Henry Hasseborg, an art critic addicted to inflammatory rhetoric, embody the predatory aspect of the cultural scene that alternates in building up models and tearing them down to satisfy the public's mimetic desire.

The figure of Hasseborg plays a similarly *mimetic* role in Hustvedt's novel to the one of George Lane in McEwan's *Amsterdam*. Both are quite literally powerful *mediators* of desires in that they work in media, George Lane as a shareholder of a newspaper and Hasseborg as an art critic. Also, neither character gets his hands dirty, but rather, they influence others through opinion and suggestion. George Lane avenges his low self-esteem on his sexual rivals by enhancing their antagonism for each other. Hasseborg harbours similar resentment towards

Bill, because as a failed artist himself, he senses Bill's indifference to fame as such. He thus takes an equally mimetic and celebrity-starved protégé, Teddy Giles, under his wing. By tearing Bill down and building Giles up in his criticism, Hasseborg manages to set the two artists against each other, if only after the fact. In Leo's view, Hasseborg's affinity with Giles derives from the resentful iconoclasm the critic shares with the artist:

And although I was biased against Hasseborg, I began to feel that he had fallen for Giles because the man's work was the visual embodiment of his own voice—that smirking, cynical, joyless tone he usually adopted in his articles about art and artists. (WIL, 203)

Hasseborg's resentment of Bill chronologically precedes the favouritism he showers Giles with. This suggests that his endorsement of Giles merely reverses the critic's abuse of Bill. Both approaches have more to do with creating uproar in the art community than with objective aesthetic evaluation of the artworks themselves:

When the *Hansel and Gretel* works were shown, they caused a ruckus. The man behind the uproar was Henry Hasseborg, who had written an article for *DASH: The Downtown Arts Scene Herald* with the headline GLAMOUR BOY'S MISOGYNIST VISION. Hasseborg first accused Bill of adopting "the dressed-down macho look of the Abstract Expressionists to pander the wealthy European collectors." He then blasted the work as "facile illustration" and went on to call it "the most blatant artistic expression of the hatred of women in recent memory." In three tightly packed columns of print, Hasseborg fumed and boiled and spat venom. The article included a large photograph of Bill wearing sunglasses and looking very much like a movie star. (WIL, 85)

A critic who assumes the role of a contemporary high priest and sets out to scapegoat a member of the artist community is a motif Hustvedt's *What I Loved* shares with earlier works that concern themselves with struggling artists and the tribulations these must heroically overcome in order to have their visions vindicated in the end. The resentful critic therefore plays the role of the fairy tale dragon to the artist's valiant prince.<sup>71</sup> Although Hasseborg is

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<sup>71</sup> One is reminded, for example, of Ayn Rand's *The Fountainhead* (1943) in which the architectural critic Ellsworth M. Toohey, seeks to destroy the reputation of the one truly innovative architect, Howard Roark, while siding with his mediocre but popular colleague, Peter Keating. Like Hasseborg in Hustvedt's *What I Loved*, Toohey also uses a glamorous photograph out of context in order to brand his enemy-idol as an egotist: "[...] [Ellsworth Toohey] found, in the *Banner's* morgue, the photograph of Roark at the opening of the Enright House, the photograph of a man's face in a moment of exaltation, and he had it printed in the *Banner*, over the caption: 'Are you happy, Mr. Superman?'" (p. 342). Both Rand and Hustvedt's fictional critics have analogous names that emphasize their resentful functions. Ellsworth Toohey's first name consists of "Ells" that resembles the word "else," and "worth," suggesting that he is overly concerned with the worth of someone else. The character is indeed dedicated to the eradication of individualism and stresses the value of all things collective; his last name tells the reader in no uncertain terms what Rand's implied author thinks of this project of resentment

definitely portrayed by Hustvedt as villainous, Bill is not an outright hero, but the starkly Manichean dualism of the good artist / evil critic is compromised by the degree to which Bill is influenced by the resentment of Hasseborg, albeit that this influence manifests itself in despair and depression rather than in outright aggression. If Hasseborg is prone to sadism, then Bill more readily gravitates towards masochism.

Bill, with all his heroic attributes and “autonomy” (*WIL*, 9), is very much affected by the communal assaults he must suffer:

Over the years, Bill would regularly inspire hatred in people who didn't know him, and every time it happened, he felt wounded and surprised. His handsome face cursed him, but far more damaging was the fact that strangers, usually in the form of journalists, dimly perceived his code of honor, that maddening certainty that accepted no compromise. To some, usually Europeans, this made him a romantic figure—a fascinating and mysterious genius. To others, usually Americans, Bill's stringent convictions were like a slap in the face, a frank acknowledgement that he was not “a regular guy.” (*WIL*, 86)

That European art consumers can afford to venerate Bill as a romantic hero is a result of their geographical – and therefore also social – distance, whereas Bill's fellow Americans are more prone to what Girard would call ‘internal mediation,’ a mimetic relation defined by its proximity with the model of desire. In internal desire, concrete objects are quickly side-tracked and give way to a desire that has as its sole object the being of the other person. Bill treats his creations ‘objectively,’ as ends in themselves, and not as means with which to win compliments from the media or his professional community; however, unlike Howard Roark, the stoical main character of Ayn Rand's *The Fountainhead*, he is not above getting hurt by the resentment and envy following in his wake. The fact that Bill refuses to respond to the rivalry he inspires makes him a perfect scapegoat, a king-like figure whose position by virtue of its aloofness turns him into a veritable outsider (cf. Girard 2005, 12-13).

There is, however, no final expulsion of a definitive scapegoat in the story world art community of *What I Loved*, since the mimetic feud fuelled by Hasseborg is reciprocated by

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(“Toohey” rhyming with the contemporary, i.e., the time during and preceding the 1940's, colloquial dismissal, “hoey,” as in the phrase “That's a lot of hoey!”). Henry Hasseborg's name has traces of the German noun “Hass” (“hatred”) or the verb “hassen” (“to hate”). The use of German as the allusive language would echo Bill's last name Wechsler which is explicitly referred to in the novel as having the root meaning of “change, changing, and making change” (*WIL*, 67). The second part of Hasseborg's name, “borg,” on the other hand, means “castle” in the Scandinavian languages (which the Norwegian-American Hustvedt is more than acquainted with; cf. Hustvedt 2012, 59); Hasseborg is thus rendered as a virtual fortress or bastion of hatred, a literally towering figure of vengeance.

counter-arguments in favor of Bill's work. But far from leading up to Bill's exoneration, the debate becomes an end in itself in the art world that is deeply immersed in a mimetic crisis:

The unintended twist to the story was that Hasseborg's spleen inspired three other articles on *Hansel and Gretel*—one equally hostile to it and two others that praised it. One of the positive articles appeared in *Artforum*, a magazine more important than *DASH*, and the contentious debate brought more and more people to the gallery. They came to see the witch. It was Bill's witch who had ostensibly driven Hasseborg into a fury. Her panty hose had so offended him that he had devoted an entire paragraph to the stockings and pubic hair beneath. The woman who reviewed the work for *Artforum* continued the panty-hose discursus with three paragraphs defending Bill's use of the garment. After that, several artists Bill had never met telephoned with their sympathies and praise for his work. Hasseborg hadn't meant to do it, but he had coaxed Bill's witch out into the open, and she, in turn, had cast a spell over the art world through the magic of controversy. (*WIL*, 87-88)

The metaphor of witchcraft, with the "magic" and "spells" that go with it, is very mimetic, and like "the mental heat" and "strange weather" (*WIL*, 70) used earlier to describe the dynamics of the New York art world of the 1980's, it works to expose the metaphysical preoccupations of its occupants and how they are not concerned with objects of art as such, but with the prestige and titillating "controversy" that these objects are impregnated with.

It is important to note, that also those critics who defend Bill are involved in the mimetic conflict. It is telling that Bill, while in the depressed state that precedes his premature death, cannot take solace in the positive criticism of his work while remaining troubled about the negative criticism. As Violet explains to Leo after her husband's death: "Reviewers roughed him up pretty bad. Their spite seemed to come from the fact that there were other people who were so fanatically devoted to his work, but he forgot all the good things that happened to him" (*WIL*, 262). In the rapid pendulum movement of "spite" and "devot[ion]," the quality of the criticism gets buried under the extremity with which it is disseminated.

That Bill possibly views himself as a scapegoat figure in the art community could be detected from his most autobiographical work, *O's Journey*. The narrative of the installation that is made up of cubic boxes populated by dolls and other figures of varying sizes and dimensions, has the main character simply disappear in the end:

[...]—not die, just vanish. In the penultimate cube, he would be only half visible—a specter of himself. In the final cube, O would be gone, but in his room the viewer would see a half-finished canvas. What Bill intended to put on the canvas, I didn't know, and I don't think he knew either. (*WIL*, 127)

Ironically, although O is not supposed to die an actual death but a more poetic one, Bill will die years later in a manner so sudden that his final work, a video called “Icarus,” is left unfinished just like O’s canvas. Although Bill is not killed but dies of natural causes, his self-destructive lifestyle complete with drinking, smoking, over-work, and depression owes much to witnessing Mark’s degeneration, as well as the conflictual atmosphere of the art world.

From the point of view of mimetic theory, it is interesting that Bill explicitly stresses that the character of O does not die but merely disappears. The emphasis could be interpreted as yet another case of a gentleman protesting too much. The same kind of ‘muting’ of the victim’s voice and the presentation of his death as something else than a killing that we saw in the analysis of Tarrt’s *The Secret History*, takes place in Bill’s artwork. Like Romulus, who according to one legend was enveloped in a cloud never to be seen again on earth but who in Girard’s reading of the foundational Roman myth was in fact murdered by his senators (Girard 1989, 88-94), the character O ends his life’s journey in a similarly euphemistic way.

That Bill’s artistic alter ego is embodied in the letter O is also significant from a mimetic point of view. ‘O’ stands for emptiness, and the character’s physical craving for a roast beef (or, more correctly, “his own painting of a roast beef”; *WIL*, 125) could be seen as a desire for a fullness of metaphysical being.

The meaning of the ‘O’ is mimetic in that it is used by Hustvedt’s narrative to designate parallels and contrasts between different characters. It is Bill’s mentally troubled and institutionalized brother, Dan, who has the eccentric habit of making an “O sign” with his fingers (*WIL*, 64-65). Although devoted to Bill, Dan nevertheless suffers from chronic paranoia and at times believes that his brother is out to kill him. On the day of Bill’s funeral Dan expresses genuine grief by clutching one of his dead brother’s paintings close to his chest. Leo is concerned that he might tarnish the painting with his sweat by holding it under his shirt, but appreciates the deeper meaning of Dan’s behaviour: “[...] I knew why he was holding the object next to his skin. He wanted no separation between himself and the little painting, because somewhere in the wood and canvas and metal he imagined that he was touching his older brother” (*WIL*, 258).

Although haunted by the paranoia of fratricide, Dan does not pursue a brotherly feud with Bill. And although detached from everyday life because of his illness, Dan is able to distinguish between subjects and objects; he values Bill’s painting not as a surrogate for the live person, but as a mere trace of him, one that inevitably falls short of the real thing. In this way, he is diametrically opposed to Mark whom Leo laments as being less alive than the

portrait painted of him (*WIL*, 321). In a cryptic poem, Dan even warns Leo and Violet about the “corpse”-like apathy of Mark (*WIL*, 270).

The ‘O’-like hollowness treated by Bill and evidenced by Mark is a common plague in the mimetic art world of the novel. This socio-moral cautionary tale is dramatized in the contrasting relationship between two different artist characters, Bill Wechsler and Teddy Giles. But although the contrast prevails in the end and works in Bill’s favor, there is a fair share of mimetic “mixing” (cf. *WIL*, 91) going on in the dynamic between these enemy brothers, as was pointed out in their rivalry over a contested ‘object,’ the filial status of Mark.

The difference between the two artists does not, however, lie in the choice of medium. Both Bill and Giles use pictures, artifacts and reproductive media such as photography and video. So medium is *not* the message, but rather, according to Hustvedt’s representational ethics, all media bear equal responsibility for their content. Also, the theme of imitation is not restricted to representation, but it encompasses behavioral patterns and human relations at work outside the screens and canvases, as well.

Whereas Bill uses his life and relationships with other people as material for his contemplative and intricate works, Giles lies about his personal and social background (whether his mother was a negligent prostitute or a respectable waitress or something in between remains a point of deliberate ambiguity until Giles is arrested and tried for murder, *WIL*, 203) and turns these lies – which the art world sanctions in the name of “subversion” (*WIL*, 300) and “shifting identities” (*WIL*, 203) – into a creation in which his persona and art are one.

With these differences in mind, the implied reader is advised to make an ethical conclusion pertaining to the aesthetic one, namely, that, whereas Bill’s work is fiction, Giles’s is fabrication. Even at their most symbolic and caricatured forms, Bill’s creations nevertheless retain a distance between people and objects, whereas Leo describes the violence-obsessed exhibitions by Giles as “vacuous scenes of slaughter” (*WIL*, 203). In an installation resembling “the aftermath of a massacre,” Giles has mannequins stand in as victims of dismemberment and decapitation drenched in fake blood (*WIL*, 201). Leo concludes that “[Giles’s artworks] criticized nothing and they revealed nothing. The work was simulacra excreted from the culture’s bowels [...]” (*WIL*, 203). This makes Giles’s work not only morally but also aesthetically suspect, compared to his great predecessor in the depiction of violent events, Goya (on whom Leo is conducting research). Like Goya in his “black paintings” such as the one about Saturn devouring his son, Giles also deals with violence and comments on its social role, but still, for Leo, Goya’s art feels alive and Giles’s dead (*WIL*,

202). This is because Giles celebrates the mayhem he supposedly criticizes, whereas Goya – with an implicit parallel to Bill – empathizes with the suffering he depicts and mediates to the viewer. Giles’s oeuvre is dedicated to the worship of destruction, both of people and objects. His destruction of Bill’s painting of Mark is thus related to his murder of a homeless boy named Rafael Hernandez but nicknamed “Me,” a pun that indicates the destruction of identity and selfhood as such. One could therefore say that Giles is a very poststructuralist criminal, whose moral transgression is also an act of deconstruction. In the late 1970’s, when Derrida was gaining increasing popularity in the French theory scene, Girard emphatically criticized “the castration of the signified” that deconstruction applied to its logical conclusion would spell (Girard 1987, 442). This postmodern ‘anything goes’ ethos is parodied in Hustvedt’s novel through Leo’s paraphrasing the fashionable rhetoric Hasseborg uses in his panegyric of Giles’s exhibition:

Hasseborg ran at the mouth for several pages, his prose roiling with hyperbolic adjectives: “brilliant,” “riveting,” “astounding.” He quoted Baudrillard, panted over Giles’s shifting identities, and then in one long and final grandiloquent sentence, pronounced him “the artist of the future.” (*WIL*, 202-203)

Bill, unlike Giles, seeks to contemplate the tragedy inherent in the absence of meaning instead of celebrating it. When Bill takes up the question of identity and the experience of emptiness and influence that goes with it, he stakes himself, if only subconsciously. While viewing Bill’s installation, *O’s Journey*, Leo remarks that it is a kind of autobiography, although, purely externally, the story does not parallel Bill’s life (*WIL*, 126-127).

However, the visual and conceptual play on the alphabet in *O’s Journey* quite clearly externalizes Bill’s inner life, and the letter motif of the art work points to experiences of the self’s emptiness and a desire for fulfilment. The main character, the starving artist figure named O could be interpreted as standing for Bill’s own feeling of lack and unfulfilled desire, whereas the two embracing little dolls that are both branded with the letter M and together form the commercial sweets brand *M&M* are a clear allusion to the uncannily doubled relationship between Matthew and Mark – the mimetic quality of which is only fully revealed in the future, with Matthew’s death and Mark’s delinquency still to come. Also, the fact that O’s parents are named X and Y has a meaning that transcends the purely genetic allusion to chromosomes:

“Meet O’s mother.” He held up a tall thin plastic figure with pink eyes. “This is O’s poor mother, long-suffering, kindhearted, but a bit of a lush. I’m calling her X. Y is

O's father. He's never going to appear in the flesh, you see. He's just a letter hovering in the distance or over O's head, a thought, an idea. Nevertheless, X and Y begot O. It makes sense, don't you think? X as in former, the once-was ex-wife, or X marks the spot, but also X as in a kiss on the bottom of a letter. You see, she loves him. And then there's Y, the big missing Y as in W-H-Y?" (*WIL*, 125-126)

That Bill is dealing with the separation of his own parents and his father's absence from his childhood – an absence that preceded the divorce, since Bill's father appeared to be estranged even from his own life, a fact underlined by Bill's portraits of him that depict their model from behind (*WIL*, 43) – becomes painfully evident in the way he identifies with the character of O. Furthermore, Bill is afraid of repeating his father's mistakes with Mark whom he feels he abandoned by divorcing Lucille (*WIL*, 244).

Bill's explanation of his artistic intentions to Leo takes on psychoanalytic overtones, as the artist opens up his oedipal dreamscape for the art critic's professional scrutiny; Bill enters into a transference with Leo, urging his 'analyst' to confirm his own views about his self image- as -art work ("you see"; "don't you think?"). But Bill's work is also anchored in the social background of its time, when the upsurge in divorce and re-marriage has caused a meltdown in traditional family structure. Enter a Charles Mansonesque father figure like Teddy Giles who volunteers to exercise his ambiguously paternal influence over the many spiritual orphans like Mark who flock to him.

While not conservatively lamenting the change in nuclear family values, Hustvedt's novel still reveals the dangerous potential that the meltdown of social structure has opened up. This dark side of emancipation is embodied by the nihilistic villain, Giles, who exploits the postmodernist hype of the contemporary art community. And although Leo, as the novel's narrator and main focalizer, is biased (he himself admits as much; *WIL*, 203) and thus prone to side with Bill, the text as a whole more than implies that Bill's work is an extension of his constancy, just like the hollowness Leo detects in Giles's work reflects the fickleness of that artist's persona.

That said, there is an unmistakable air of the Romantic and autonomous artist mystique that Leo, in his mimeticism, attaches to Bill's being. But, as was already noted in chapter 2.3., throughout the course of his narrative, Leo also manages to unmask his own 'Romantic lie,' becoming in the end more 'novelistic.' Hasseborg manages to do no such thing in his idolatry of Giles. Thus, the moral high ground that Leo and Bill occupy in contrast to Hasseborg and Giles is not so much *essential* as it is *relational*.



When interpreted in the context of mimetic theory, the main difference between the two artists could be said to be that Bill is open to the influences of other artists and traditions whom he regards as positive models, whereas Giles's preoccupation with violence, not merely as a subject matter but also as a method, is tantamount to his denial of models. Therefore, Giles is torn by a double bind; as a poster boy for postmodernity, he cannot claim to be original, but neither can he confess to imitation, since, according to the postmodernist credo, there should be nothing of real primacy *to imitate*.

To compensate for his obvious and unspectacular lack of autonomy, Giles parades his disintegrated identity through the various public personas he has invented for himself and which he changes as if they were mere clothes on his back:

Giles gave interviews in various personas. Sometimes he dressed as a woman, delivering his comments in an absurd falsetto. At other times, he wore a suit and tie and sounded like a broker discussing his deals. I understood why people were fascinated by Giles. His voracious desire for attention forced him to reinvent himself regularly. (*WIL*, 241)

Giles's "desire for attention" and the predictability of his metamorphoses, far from being embarrassing evidence of unoriginality, actually fuel the mimetic fascination of media culture that is itself a mirror of the people's desire for extraordinary, superhuman autonomy. Girard's paradox thus comes true in the story world of Hustvedt's novel: the more subjects seek to distinguish themselves, the more similar they become.

Bill, on the other hand, welcomes outside influences and atelier criticism. This is evident, among other things, in the fact that Bill's artistic projects are paralleled by his wife's scientific ones, and the spouses inspire each other. Also, Bill continues to consult Leo both in matters personal and professional, from the moment they first meet until a little before his sudden death from a heart attack. Unlike Giles, Bill manages to separate inanimate art objects from living human subjects. It is this distinction that in Girard's novelistic universe would make Bill a hero worthy of emulation, and not any essentially Romantic uniqueness of vision.

### **Eating Disorders and the Crisis of Distinction**

In *What I Loved*, food, like art, is seen as an object revealing the worldview and self-image of a given character. On a more general level, attitudes towards food and the physical and social act of eating – as well as the disorders these attitudes and acts involve – embody the mental and spiritual condition of the times, namely the end of the twentieth century. The

‘postmodern’ fragmentation of identity does not necessarily cancel out the cultural and psychological phenomena of the past (e.g., medieval religious asceticism, the nineteenth century’s fascination with physical ailments as signifying Romantic individualism, etc.) but absorbs them into its fluctuating continuum of shifting selfhoods.

The character in the novel that most embodies the ethical position in matters directly concerning the question of eating is neither of the central male characters, but Violet; her foil in this, as well as in other matters, is Lucille (perhaps not surprisingly, the realms of food and eating disorders, respectively, are mainly relegated to female characters, though not altogether). Violet’s academic excursions into the social and cultural history of eating disorders deal with personalities that resemble the fictionalized characters that inhabit her husband’s paintings, sculptures and installations. The subjects of her case studies strive to make themselves into works of art and in the process blur the boundaries between subject and object – just like Mark’s mother and Bill’s ex-wife Lucille does with her rigidly precise poems (the reading of which, according to Leo’s literary scholar wife Erica, is “like eating dust”; *WIL*, 34; the oral metaphor is hardly superfluous) and Teddy Giles with his murder art (which involves an actual murder in addition to the many simulated ones). Behind these identity projects lies a very metaphysical desire to gain self-reliance so complete and rigid that it borders on the inanimate.

The title of Violet’s book is *Locked Bodies*, and it captures the pursuit of autonomy in an age of growing undifferentiation. The book opens with a series of questions: “Why are thousands of girls in the West starving themselves now? Why are others gorging and vomiting? Why is obesity on the rise? Why did these once rare diseases become epidemics?” (*WIL*, 162). One answer is to be found in the loss of former hierarchies and institutions that assigned individuals their place in the order of things and dictated the rules of the game called society. In a manner recalling Girard’s theories of the post-religious cultural meltdown resulting in the internalization of mimetic desire, Violet argues “that social upheavals lie behind eating disorders, including the breakdown of courting rituals and sexual codes, which leaves young women formless and vulnerable” (*WIL*, 163). Violet finds it astonishing that when women in former times strove to transcend and escape social restrictions, for example through hysterics, modern women build their own boundaries (*WIL*, 81).

In his article, “Eating Disorders and Mimetic Desire” (1996), dealing with the cultural motivations of anorexia and bulimia, Girard makes similar observations to those of Violet in Hustvedt’s novel. To underline the historical change that has taken place in bulimia

especially, Girard draws a comparison between Ancient Roman gluttons and the overachieving career girls of the mid-1990's.<sup>72</sup> Compared to the latter,

[...] the decadent Romans were innocent sensualists. They, too, were eating and vomiting in turn, but for themselves only and not for anybody else. [...] Our modern bulimic is eating for herself, to be sure, but she is vomiting for others, for all these women who are watching each other's waistlines. Her radical freedom is synonymous with her enslavement to the opinion of others. (Girard 2012, 8)

According to Girard, the cause for eating disorders, like so many other cultural pathologies involving self-image, is not "our families, the class system, the male gender as a whole, the Christian churches," but "the uninvited guest that no one ever expects, the mimetic rival" (Girard 2012, 7). Although Violet also juggles psychoanalytical and religious dynamics as possible causes (mother-daughter relationships are mentioned, as are some starving renegade saints of medieval Catholicism), she definitely gravitates towards a decidedly 'mimetic' hypothesis:

In an age that has absorbed the nuclear threat, biological warfare, and AIDS, the perfect body has become an armor—hard, shiny, and impenetrable. She marshaled evidence from exercise tapes and advertisements for programs and machines, including the telling phrases "buns of steel" and "bullet-proof abs." Saint Catherine starved against church authority for Jesus. Late-twentieth-century girls starve for themselves against their parents and a hostile, borderless world. (*WIL*, 162-163)

If one examines the change in the dynamics of identity imitation that has taken place in Violet's analysis of contemporary body image through Girard's concepts of external and internal mediation, respectively, it becomes clear that there are no longer fixed mediators of desire, but that the (post)modern subject must fend for herself. This does not mean that she is capable of giving up imitation altogether, but rather that she must look for models *anywhere*. There are indeed no borders for her *external* existence, so she must erect new, *internal* ones.

What has been shattered, not only in the nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century novels studied by Girard, but also in Hustvedt's *What I Loved*, is the stability of society and the predictability of its hierarchical power struggle. A medieval nun still had her patriarchal clergy who demanded her to conform to conventional piety and a gender-prescribed meekness (and by doing so offered something definite to rebel against), but a late-twentieth-century girl, even with her parents hovering somewhere in the background of her disintegrating social

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<sup>72</sup> Notice that, although Girard mainly uses the female pronoun to describe bulimics, and Violet in Hustvedt's novel talks about the social disorientation faced by young women and girls in particular, neither excludes male subjects from their discussion of eating disorders (Girard 2012, 1; *WIL*, 163).

identity, faces only “a hostile, borderless world.” She has to build anew the crumbled sets for her quixotic drama, even though the traditional villains have long ceased to be anything but cardboard cut-outs. Her true enemies are her exact peers with whom she feels compelled to keep up, as previous generations used to keep up with the proverbial ‘Joneses.’ The only difference, albeit an important one, is that everybody and anybody can be a ‘Jones’ from now on.<sup>73</sup>

In *What I Loved*, the story arc of Mark’s character is a case in point, when it comes to the internalization of mimetic desire. Mark’s inner vacuity is not born in a vacuum, but is demonstrative of a hollow society and its mass culture. According to the sociologist Anthony Elliott, the typical performing self (as defined by Erving Goffman) is captured by Woody Allen’s fantasy comedy film *Zelig* (1983) about a man who changes his external appearance in order to blend in with whatever group he comes into contact with. Leonard Zelig, the eponymous character of Allen’s film is

[...] a man so lacking in selfhood that his life completely dissolves into role-playing. Zelig is focused to such a degree on making a good impression on others that he, literally, takes on the personality of whomever he is with – at one moment, in a jazz club, he becomes a black musician; at another moment, when eating spaghetti in a restaurant, he becomes Italian; later he turns up in Germany as a member of Hitler’s Nazi party. Understanding Goffmann’s performing self in terms of Allen’s movie *Zelig* is useful perhaps only to a point, but it does offer us a grim sense of the psychological costs of impression management in a culture in which a premium is put on appearance. (Elliott 2008, 42-43)

The supreme irony of Allen’s *Zelig* is, of course, the way it externalizes internal behaviour. The realist genre adopted by *What I Loved* does not allow its characters to change their ethnicity. There is, however, in Hustvedt’s novel, a scene in which Leo witnesses Mark adopting a different kind of behavioural approach with each different person he meets while walking on the street, showcasing tenderness with a dog in front of its owner, flirtatiousness with an attractive woman, and nonchalant superiority with a younger boy who looks up to him (*WIL*, 203-204). This scene marks Leo’s first intimation of Mark’s chameleon-like existence that has such major ramifications later in the narrative. What Elliott does not mention about *Zelig* is, that the character’s Protean metamorphoses can be traced to a childhood trauma of

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<sup>73</sup>In *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World*, Girard remarks on the historical trend the ‘Jones’ proverb has undergone, namely that in intellectual circles at least, rigid demands for conservatism have been replaced by equally rigid demands for radicalism (Girard 1987, 287).

having grown up in a quarrelsome home. This background, as well as a New York Jewish ethnicity, is what the characters of Mark Wechsler and Leonard Zelig have in common.

The most flamboyant demonstration of Mark's chameleon-likeness is his dressing up as a woman and posing as Giles's wife during the nightmarish chase across American heartland upon which Giles lures Leo to embark. Mark's drag act at first appears to be a sign of affinity with one of the hysterical women Violet has conducted research on, a woman called Augustine who escaped from the Pitié-Salpêtrière Hospital disguised as a man (*WIL*, 73). Augustine, however, managed to break away from under her dominating doctor Charcot's influence. She could therefore be interpreted as a contrast to Mark who does not succeed in discarding Giles's malign influence.

At a first glance it would seem that whereas a male-to-female drag act has negative overtones in Hustvedt's novel, recalling perhaps the stereotypical sadomasochistic relationship between the masculine man and the more effeminate counterpart<sup>74</sup> (a staple of pederastic hierarchy), a female-to-male dress-up in the manner of Augustine is marked by a decidedly emancipatory connotation. Augustine's quite literally liberating disguising of herself in men's clothing is echoed by Violet who, after Bill's death, takes on a habit of visiting his studio and, while there, wearing his old clothes and smoking his favourite brand of cigarettes. Although Leo is initially baffled by Violet's mourning ritual, he does not protest when Violet assures him that it "helps" (*WIL*, 261) her get over Bill's death. Obviously, despite its symbiotic implications, Violet's drag act is not comparable to the disturbing role play that Giles and Mark engage in.

However, it is not necessarily the difference between male-to-female and female-to-male cross-dressing that explains this contrast between Mark on the one hand and Violet and Augustine on the other (Hustvedt's earlier novel, *The Blindfold*, 1992, has a decidedly negative incidence of female-to-male cross-dressing when the main character Iris Vegan's performative male identity takes on uncanny and obsessive overtones). The essential difference could be found, not in gender, but in the quality of mimesis, and the varying functions of *hypnosis* on the one hand and *possession* on the other.

In her book, *The Knotted Subject: Hysteria and Its Discontents* (1998), Elisabeth Bronfen paraphrases Jean-Michel Oughourlian's<sup>75</sup> Girardian findings according to which "in contrast

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<sup>74</sup> The pederastic relationship between Giles and Mark appears to break with this pattern, since it is Mark who is more masculine of the two; at least, outside his cross-dressing antics, he is not androgynous in the same way that Giles is.

<sup>75</sup> Bronfen alludes to Oughourlian's *Un mime nommé desir. Hystérie, transe, possession, adoration* (1982, Paris: Bernard Grasset).

to possession, enacting a subjection before the Other, hysteria stages a revolt, a contest, an insurrection against the Other, who is perceived as a rival” (Bronfen 1998, 203). Applied to Hustvedt’s novel, then, one could make the case that by escaping in the guise of a man from under her oppressive male doctor’s nose, Augustine not only stages a revolt against Charcot and the patriarchal structure this ‘Napoleon of neuroses’ stands for, but also, through her drag act, imitates her nemesis. Augustine thus starkly contrasts Mark who willingly gives up his prerogative to choose his identity traits and hands them over to his mediator, Giles; Giles’s own drag identity, “She-Monster,” on the contrary, is every bit as violent and aggressive as any male serial killer. Again, gender alone does not assign activity or passivity to the subject.

But where does this cross-dressing revolt put Violet? She is obviously not attacking Bill by putting on his clothes. Nor is she escaping from any malign influence he supposedly exerts on her. By the end of the novel, she is still wearing his clothes, but unlike Mark’s uncanny drag-act with its sadomasochistic overtones, Violet’s crossdressing is in the end a beneficial ritual which consists not so much in any necrophilia but rather recognizes the fact of Bill’s death and commemorates his life.

Although Mark is not suffering from eating disorders *per se*, his shape-shifting bears a resemblance to what Violet in her study calls “a sociological virus,” namely the American ‘hysteria’ about food” (*WIL*, 124): “She told me that she used the word *virus* because a virus is neither living nor dead. Its animation depends on its host” (*WIL*, 124-125). Violet’s “sociological virus” is strikingly similar to Girard’s “ontological sickness,” and mimetic desire is also tantamount to being animated into action by the “host,” or the model of desire.

Mark’s mother Lucille’s overall aloofness and emotional sterility, as well as her ascetic attitude towards, among other things, food (at one point she complains that her son eats too much; *WIL*, 174; she is also very probably the real-life inspiration for the self-starving figure in Bill’s *O’s Journey*, “one of O’s girlfriends”; *WIL*, 126), may be the root cause for Mark’s gravitating towards Giles who is a moral and psychological neutral. Giles, a cultural bulimic and a spiritual cannibal, is a strange caricature whose public persona combines the pale and emaciated look of the nineteenth-century decadent dandy with the flamboyant antics of a 1980’s drag queen. In a typically bulimic fashion, Giles oscillates between carnevalistic excess and monastic abstinence.

The shaping of one’s own identity through acts of consumption is linked to how the self relates to the Other as a mirror image of the desired effect. In *What I Loved*, the devouring of another being and carving out his or her identity is tantamount to practicing a mental, spiritual and cultural form of cannibalism. The cannibalistic motif is evidenced by allusions to art

(Goya's paintings of *Saturn devouring his son* and children offered as sacrifices in *The Witches' Sabbath*, Bill's use of the sweets brand *M&M* as signifying the symbiosis between Matthew and Mark), but also food – and especially the way food is viewed as an object of a more abstract desire than mere appetite would imply. Just like the name of the artist is uprooted from the works he produces, eating behaviours become tokens of prestige that ultimately have nothing to do with food as a concrete object. What appears to be the most physical of dimensions, emerges as one of the most *metaphysical* ones. This paradox is most evident in the parts of Hustvedt's novel that deal with eating disorders and how these "epidemics" (*WIL*, 162) are symptomatic of a larger meltdown in a contemporary culture that is torn by the ever more uncontrollable rivalries over the elusive 'autonomy' of identity.

Girard's thesis about the mimetic character of desire paradoxically underlying the pursuit of autonomy is in keeping with Violet's findings in *What I Loved*. "I like to see my bones. I like to see them and feel them. When there's too much fat between me and my bones, I feel farther away from myself" (*WIL*, 105), one of Violet's subjects explains her pathology. Another interviewee, a girl called Cathy (and nicknamed Saint Catherine by Violet, after a Dominican nun who fasted herself to death in medieval Italy) has her anorexia take on a decidedly metaphysical dimension; Violet describes Cathy as "a monster of purity [...]" who is "fiercer and more righteous than any nun. [...]. If she eats half a cracker, she feels sullied and guilty. She looks horrible, but her eyes shine with pride" (*WIL*, 124). Yet another young woman studied by Violet, one named Angie, appears to be Cathy's exact opposite. Angie is obese to the extreme, "a walking mouth, a repository for cupcakes and Fudgsicles and boxes of pretzels and mountains of sugared cereal" (*WIL*, 124). But with all their external differences, Angie's and Cathy's goals are strikingly similar, since both aim to safeguard their autonomy from the polluting proximity of others and remain spiritual as well as physical untouchables. As does Cathy through emaciation, Angie risks death through excess, but under her layers of fat she feels safe. "Nobody can get through all that blubber, and that's what she wants" (*WIL*, 124), Violet concludes her observation of Angie. As for the unity of the seemingly different cases of anorexia and obesity, she sums up her social diagnosis in the form of a synthesis between the two diseases: "Emaciation in the midst of plenty shows that you are above ordinary desire, obesity that you are protected by stuffing that can ward off all attacks" (*WIL*, 163). Although Girard does not analyze obesity as minutely as he does emaciation, it could be argued that in mimetic rivalry, protecting oneself with layers of fat like in the case study of Angie, is a strategy of giving up the fight, and therefore succumbing to mimetic nihilism by virtue of depression and being scapegoated by the society whose only

shared ideal in an otherwise disintegrating culture is slenderness (cf. Girard 2012, 5). As noted earlier, Girard distrusts the medical categories that over-emphasize the differences between eating disorders and maintains instead that

[...] we live in a world where eating too much and not eating enough are opposite but inseparable ways of coping with the slenderness imperative that dominates our collective imaginations. Most of us oscillate all our lives between attenuated forms of these two pathologies. (Girard 2012, 1-2)

Girard sees in (post)modern eating disorders parallels with an ancient custom of the Northwestern Native American tribes like the Kwakiutl known as “the potlatch”. This highly competitive ritual is a form of showing off one’s material wealth in an act of “conspicuous consumption” as the matter was phrased by the sociologist and economist Thorstein Veblen who conducted groundbreaking research on the subject.<sup>76</sup> Girard describes the potlatch as follows:

[...] great chiefs used to demonstrate their superiority by giving away their most precious possessions to their competitors, the other chiefs. They all tried to outdo one another in their contempt for wealth. The winner was the only one who gave up the most and received the least. [...].

Vast quantities of wealth were thus squandered in competitive displays of indifference to wealth, the real purpose of which was prestige. There can be rivalries of renunciation rather than acquisition, of deprivation rather than of enjoyment. (Girard 2012, 11)

The potlatch motif is echoed in *What I Loved* where Giles destroys Bill’s expensive painting and uses it in his macabre installation. As always, Girard is most interested in the religious and sacrificial foundations of contemporary malaise. Not surprisingly, he likens anorexia to demonic possession (Girard 2012, 4). This is exactly what happens to Mark, who, squeezed empty of personality by the double binds of his childhood, is possessed by the nihilistic Giles, a surrogate father, who, like Saturn in Goya’s painting, devours his spiritually adopted son.

Girard’s article resembles Hustvedt’s novel also in the way it juxtaposes food with art. When Girard writes that “everybody and everything tends towards the same absolute nothing which is triumphant in all esthetic endeavour” and that “[m]odern art is over and its end was certainly hastened, if not entirely caused, by the more and more *anorexic* temper of our century” (Girard 2012, 18; italics in the original), he is no doubt thinking about the kinds of hype artists who populate the story world of *What I Loved*. Indeed, the character of Teddy

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<sup>76</sup> Veblen, Thorstein. 1899. *Theory of the Leisure Class*. New York: McMillan /cit. Girard 2012, 10.



Giles seems already to have moved on from what Girard calls “the fetish of innovation” to the “chaotic eclecticism” that characterizes the postmodern era – an era that is leaving anorexia behind and embracing bulimia as a more relativist and flexible option (Girard 2012, 19).

In her research, Violet also talks about a very mimetic concept of “mixing,” what in her philosophy amounts to “the short version” of Hegelian dialectics, as opposed to Cartesian logic: “It isn’t: I think, therefore I am. It’s: I am because you are” (*WIL*, 91). Against the context of eating disorders, “mixing” is about attachment development in children and how food becomes the one tangible object of an otherwise elusive emotional battle (*WIL*, 163). An ambivalent relationship with food also plays a role in Mark’s troublesome identity. The first time Leo catches the boy lying is when he flatly denies eating a boxful of doughnuts. The lie is all the more striking since it is over such a trivial matter, besides which the doughnuts were meant for Mark in the first place. Leo traces the issue back to Mark’s ascetic upbringing by the emotionally sterile Lucille, whose neutral and tasteless cooking seems to echo her personality and presents a stark contrast to Violet’s healthy appetite and emotional responsiveness in general. Mark’s emotional hunger is also evident in his drug habit, and in an eerie meeting with Giles, Leo suddenly finds Mark overdosing in the artist’s toilet (*WIL*, 290-291).

Ironically, Violet herself has a brief brush with a potential eating disorder, when, in her depressed state after Bill’s death and while witnessing Mark’s pathological symptoms, she loses what used to be a healthy interest in food – a pronounced contrast to Lucille – and starts to “diminish” (*WIL*, 269). Leo tries to rekindle her culinary joys by sharing appetizing anecdotes about exotic dishes he has sampled at one time or another in the past while trying to spoon-feed her like a child:

Violet let me feed her. I worked very slowly, making sure that she had plenty of time to chew and swallow, that she was allowed a pause between forkfuls and took drinks of the wine. I think my scrutiny made her eat more decorously than usual, because she chewed slowly with her mouth closed, revealing her small overbite only when her lips parted to take in the morsel. We were both silent for the first few minutes, and I pretended that I didn’t see her glistening eyes or hear the noise she made every time she swallowed. Her throat must have been small and tight with anxiety, because she gulped rather loudly and then blushed at the sound. [...]. I talked about a lemon pasta I had eaten in Siena under a sky full of stars and the twenty different kinds of herring Jack had ingested in Stockholm. I talked about squids and their indigo ink in a Venetian risotto, the underground business of sneaking unpasteurized cheese into New York, and a pig I had once seen in the south of France snuffling while truffling. Violet didn’t say a word, but her eyes cleared and the corners of her mouth showed signs of amusement when I began telling her about a maître d’ in a local restaurant

who tripped and fell over a small elderly woman as he ran to greet a movie actor who had just walked through the door. (*WIL*, 272)

Through this communion with Violet, Leo manages to draw the latter's attention to objects as objects – in this instance, food – and away from personal conflicts and the metaphysics of rivalry (mimetic prestige is actually parodied by the story about the maître d' and the movie star that serves to contrast the concrete pleasure of the food items discussed).

Leo's feeding of Violet is also a gesture of reciprocity, since years before, when his son Matt had just died, Violet embarked on a culinary mission to feed the Hertzberg couple (especially the acutely depressed Erica) and prevent the parents of the dead boy from emaciating under the weight of their enormous grief (*WIL*, 139). Now, when Leo returns the favour, the cause of emaciation is also a kind of death of a son; though Mark is physically alive, his troubling behaviour is symptomatic of a metaphysical death, as he becomes increasingly automaton-like and de-personalized. This decomposition of the mind is symbolically related to the decomposition of the body, as, according to Violet, in the case of eating disorders, flesh and ideas are interrelated (*WIL*, 162). By openly taking his cue from Violet's earlier feeding behaviour, Leo acknowledges her as a model and thus transcends the rivalry of mimesis and enters into a form of reciprocity that is more loving than hateful, something akin to what Girard in *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World* calls a sameness based on love, not violence (Girard 1987, 270). An almost ritualistic focus on food as a source of pleasure (but without the excesses of gluttony or starvation) functions as a powerful weapon against metaphysical desire which disregards tangible objects in favour of empty prestige and which emphasizes autonomy over communion; Leo and Violet's exchange of gifts in the form of prepared meals is thus a kind of anti-potlach.

Violet and Leo's focus on food *as food* is a way to counter-act the cannibalistic logic present in Giles's art works. Obviously, this is precisely what cannibalism does not do, since it turns human subjects into objects of consumption. In this way, cannibalism is very mimetic and related to other forms of violence and rivalry that, in the end, have no other object in sight but their own violence.

### **Above the Crowd: Crime and the Pursuit of Autonomy**

A third dimension of culture, one that like art and food appears to belong to the concrete and tangible order of things, but that is very much a carrier of metaphysical desire, is crime. Of the three, crime, especially when it is, as in Hustvedt's novel, tantamount to murder, is also

the most mimetic in the sense emphasized by Girard's thought. The archvillain of *What I Loved*, Teddy Giles, is an *artist-criminal*, a double profession that links him with the venerable tradition of Villon, Marlowe and Genet. But unlike a full-blooded Romantic murderer, Giles denies the fact that any act of real violence took place, using the art world's deconstructive frenzy to his benefit:

Giles's arrest turned the perception of his work inside out. What had been seen as a clever commentary on the horror genre began to look like the sadistic fantasies of a murderer. The peculiar insularity of the New York art scene had often made obvious work seem subtle, stupid work intelligent, and sensational work subversive. It was all a matter of how art was "pitched." Because Giles had become a sort of minor celebrity, embraced by critics and collectors, his new designation as possible felon was both embarrassing and intriguing to the world he had left so abruptly. [...].

In the meantime, however, prices for the work went up [...]. Buyers wanted the work because it now seemed that it mimicked reality, but Giles, who freely gave interviews from Rikers, mounted a defence that was just the opposite. In an interview with *DASH*, he argued that it was all a hoax. He had staged a murder in his apartment for the benefit of his friends, using artificial blood and a realistic replica of Rafael to do it. (*WIL*, 342-343)

Giles claims that his murder of Rafael was really an "elaborate 'art joke'" (*WIL*, 343), and although his guilt is eventually proven in court, the joke really is on the art community that cannot make up its mind between art and violence. This confusion between the real and the represented that is characteristic of both eating disorders and ultraviolent imagery of "murder art" echoes Girard's thesis of metaphysical desire that finally discards the objects it initially pursued. It also corresponds to Joel Black's statement that "[...] ours is a culture that has the unique distinction of being both hyper- and anaesthetic at the same time" (Black 1991, 3).

The same paradox that characterizes the hyper-real aesthetics of violence and the elusive reality of the violent act can also be discerned as underlying the poststructuralist and postmodernist semiotics that denies access to 'the Real.' Postmodernism celebrates the multiplicity of viewpoints – those of the artist-murderer and his 'audience' –, but it is powerless to identify with the suffering of the victim. While pointing out the necessity of acknowledging the aesthetic (and not just "moral, physical, natural, or whatever term we choose as a synonym for the word *real*"; Black 1991, 3; italics in the original) dimension of violence, Black simultaneously admits this dimension's failure to adopt the victimary perspective: "Only the victim knows the brutal 'reality' of murder; the rest of us view it at a distance, often as rapt onlookers who regard its 'reality' as a peak aesthetic experience"

(ibid.). Black's analysis makes it clear that the aesthetics of murder art is permeated by the archaic sacred or secular mutations thereof (Black 1991, 29-30).

According to Black's insights on the Romantic aesthetics of crime, "[a]n artistic murder cannot be a hot-blooded crime of passion, but must be a cold-blooded act in which jealousy and revenge play no part" (Black 1991, 75). However, Giles's mimetic fixation on Bill shows that there is no individual autonomy in his psychotic mixing of art and violence, paint and blood, and that his 'works' owe a great deal to the blindness of the community that was only too happy to receive them.

If the reader is to take Leo's professional (and no doubt also personal) opinion concerning Giles's oeuvre seriously, he or she must agree that Giles is not a very good artist. Unlike the voice Bill manages to give to his creations, Giles's is all sound and fury, signifying nothing. Therefore the expansion of his simulations of violence into acts of violence could be interpreted as symptomatic of mimetic resentment he harbours against his artistic betters, most significantly Bill.

The resentment hypothesis is explicitly suggested in the case of the critic Hasseborg whose venom has killed, if not artists themselves, then at least their careers:

He had written many reviews, however, and Bill wasn't Hasseborg's first victim. In the seventies, Bernie had shown an artist named Alicia Cupp. Her delicate sculptures of fragmented bodies and bits of lace had sold very well in the Weeks Gallery. In the fall of '79, Hasseborg ravaged her work in a review for *Art in America*. "Alicia was always pretty fragile," Bernie told me, "but that article pushed her right over the edge. She was in Bellevue for a while and then she packed up and went to live in Maine. Last I heard, she was walled up in some little cabin with thirty cats. I called her once and asked her if she wanted to sell some work through me. I said she didn't have to come to New York. You know what she told me? 'I don't do that anymore, Bernie. I stopped.'" (*WIL*, 87)

The identification between people and artworks that runs through Hustvedt's novel as a recurring motif and reaches its pivot in Mark's inanimate or automaton-like character traits, is also evident in this art world anecdote about a "victim" of Hasseborg's poison pen (Alicia Cupp's sculptures are "delicate," while the sculptor herself is "fragile"). Hasseborg's destructive criticism links him with Giles even before he comes forth as the murder artist's spokesperson. By siding with the most nihilistic of contemporary artists, Hasseborg reveals the real, *mimetic* motive of his violent writing, namely the need to "stop" those artists who have the integrity he himself lacks ("For Henry Hasseborg, the admission that there were artists who were not driven by a preening vanity to advance their careers would have

amounted to an annihilation of himself. The stakes were high, and the tone of the article reflected the man's desperation"; *WIL*, 86-87).

If Giles is not identified as an artistic failure outright (not everybody agrees with Leo's private dismissal), then Hasseborg's creative shortcomings are made clear, since he is a former painter (of "muddy, semiabstract canvases nobody wanted"; *WIL*, 87) and one-time successful novelist who as a compensation took up reviewing art instead of making it. Hasseborg's position as a professional viewer links him with Leo, turning the two critics into doubles – just what the two artists, Bill and Giles, are to each other. Hasseborg's background as a failed artist – a failed *painter* no less – may also be an ironic allusion to the greatest artist-tyrant of them all, namely Hitler.<sup>77</sup>

When asked, Giles explains to Leo his artistic project with a rhetoric that simultaneously denies and strives to confirm his autonomy as an original creative subject:

He laughed. There was contentment, pleasure and charm in that laugh. I also noticed how small his teeth were—like two rows of baby teeth. "You're right," he said. "I use myself as an object. I recognize that it's not new, but nobody's quite done what I do either."

"With horror clichés, you mean?"

"Exactly. Horror is extreme, and extremes are purging. That's why people watch the films or come to see my work."

I had a strong feeling of repetition. Giles had said this before. He had probably said it a thousand times.

"But clichés are deadening, aren't they?" I said. "By their very nature they kill meaning."

He smiled at me, a little indulgently. "I'm not interested in meaning. I have to tell you, I don't think it's very important anymore. People don't care about it, really. Speed is important. And pictures. (*WIL*, 287-288)

Giles's prescription for contemporary art audiences stresses the age-old principle of catharsis through "purging" violence, while adding a modern touch of uncontrollable escalation to the "extremes." His sliding from the represented violence of his "pictures" to the actual violence of murder-as-art is made all too easy by a post-sacrificial society that can no longer control its mimetic crises. Giles is for the New York art community what Piotr Verhovenski is for the upper echelons of the Russian provincial community of Dostoevsky's *The Possessed*: a

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<sup>77</sup> Joel Black singles out Hitler's failed paintings and his intense Wagnerianism, as well as Shakespearean actor John Wilkes Booth's murder of Lincoln as examples of (failed) artists turned criminals (Black 1991, 37-38). Black refers to J.P. Stern's *Hitler: The Führer and the People* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1975, pp. 45f) and Martin Stoddard's *Art, Messianism and Crime: A Study of Antinomianism in Modern Literature and Lives* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986, p. 5).

catalyst that merely ferments the ingredients already present in the social element that is quickly boiling over into a full-blown sacrificial crisis:

One whole town, shaken by increasingly violent shocks, finally succumbs to the dizziness of the void. [...] It is all one disaster and the muddle-headed activity of the mediocre Verhovenski would never have provoked it had it not been for the demoniacal contagion and the secret complicity with the spirit of evil in the upper and middle layers of society. "We will proclaim destruction," yaps Verhovenski, "why is this idea so fascinating?" (Girard 1976, 280)

Although there is no one big outburst of social unrest in *What I Loved* as there is in *The Possessed*, and although the art community is not literally murderous as a whole, Giles's realization of his murder art programme is not exactly antithetical to the mainstream of the contemporary art scene which, in Leo's eyes, is becoming ever more flippant with its fusing of real and simulated violence, exemplified by an installation that has the shooting of a puppy as its subject, or a performative consisting of the artist hammering nails into his penis (*WIL*, 199-200).

Bill is also past the point of mythologizing his art (the muting of O's death is half-hearted and only quasi-mythological), but he has opted for what Girard would call the novelistic truth, namely dealing with the crisis, not enacting it. Giles is too busy living the mimetic crisis, and his drag persona, "She-Monster," embodies his monstrous double identity by lacing a traditional, purely gender-related cross-dressing act with violence. As Girard reminds us, archaic societies instinctively equated the blurring of sexual and gender distinctions with the threat of violence ("Violence, like sexual desire, must be forbidden wherever its presence is incompatible with communal existence."; Girard 2005, 232). However, violence, not gender, is at the heart of prohibition.

If Hasseborg is Giles's atelier critic, then Mark is his human artwork, a person Giles has 'collected' and whom he uses for his performative purposes. Mark is more of an object and less of an identity mirror to Giles who reserves the latter function to Mark's father Bill, his model-rival.

Giles is indirectly responsible for Bill's death, as well. What brings about Bill's fatal heart attack is a cryptic telephone message from a strange girl, left in Bill's answering machine in his studio: "M&M knows they killed me" (*WIL*, 262). It is later revealed, that the "me" in the message is actually the itinerant boy, Rafael Hernandez, who is one of the young boys and girls "collected" (*WIL*, 241) by Giles, and nicknamed "Me" (*WIL*, 197). Violet is convinced that hearing the sentence that implicates Mark as an accomplice to a crime no matter how

vague has prompted Bill's deadly stroke. And since Giles is not only the real murderer of Rafael, but also a seducer of Mark into all things unsavoury, he has managed to strike a deadly emotional blow that fells his idol and rival.

A victim of his parents' marital conflict, Mark strives to find acceptance elsewhere and lands in the lap of Giles who shares certain characteristics with both Mark's father and mother; Giles is an artist by profession like Bill, but otherwise he bears an uncanny resemblance to Lucille. Both Lucille and Giles are emotionally sterile; both have two sides to their somewhat schizophrenic personalities in that they oscillate between demure self-effacement and aggressive outbursts of temperament.

Regarding the affinity between Mark's spiritual father Giles and his biological mother Lucille, it is furthermore striking that both characters are associated with an aesthetics of violence. Lucille seems to suffer from a crisis similar to the one affecting Giles's thoughts and behaviour, in that she too confuses simulation and reality and treats herself as an object. Leo becomes aware of what appear to be Lucille's suicidal tendencies, when, after his one night stand with her he feels compelled to ask Bill about her mysterious "illness":

"I found her in her dorm room with her wrists cut, bleeding all over the floor." Bill paused and closed his eyes for a moment. "She was sitting on the floor holding her arms out in front of her, watching herself bleed very calmly. I grabbed her, wrapped her wrists in towels, and started yelling for help. Afterward the doctors said the cuts weren't very deep, that she probably hadn't meant to kill herself. Years later, she told me that she liked watching the blood." Bill paused. "She said a strange thing about it. She said, 'It had authenticity.' (*WIL*, 99)

Lucille's suicidal project is paradoxical; her actual bleeding gives her pleasure because of its "authenticity," but the fact that her cuts are not dangerous enough cancels out this very authenticity because she very likely "hadn't meant to kill herself." Despite her equation of beauty and violence, Lucille is not a Hedda Gabler after all. That the suicide attempt – or simulation thereof – is nevertheless 'mimetically' motivated could be deduced from the role Bill, however inadvertently, plays in it. At the time, Lucille's parents thought Bill a bad influence on their daughter, because his very presence encouraged her to toy with suicide while knowing she would be rescued. When Leo reassures Bill in retrospect, telling him the suicide attempts were not his fault, Bill is not thoroughly convinced:

"I feel bad because I liked that craziness in her. I found it dramatic. She was very beautiful then. People used to say she looked like Grace Kelly. It's awful, but a beautiful, bleeding girl is more compelling than a plain bleeding girl. I was twenty years old and a total idiot. (*WIL*, 100)

Again, Bill seems to see through mimetic desire. It is not just that Lucille was beautiful in Bill's eyes, but her beauty was augmented by other "people" who said she was beautiful and who even came up with a movie star reference to model her beauty on. When Bill dismisses his former twenty-year old "idiot" self, he is intuitively saying that equating violence with beauty should be an adolescent affair, though it has a tendency to linger into adulthood, both individually and culturally.

Lucille's "beautiful" self-mutilation is a form of narcissistic coquetry – or what Girard, in opposition to Freud – would call pseudonarcissist coquetry (cf. Girard 1987, 370-371; 356-82). Lucille's mimeticism is also evident in the way she uses Mark as a pawn in her marriage, something Bill acknowledges: "I've learned that if I insist on having him, she insists that she wants him. When I don't, she's less interested" (*WIL*, 117). Lucille's instrumentalization of her child recalls the "Judgement of Solomon" (1Kings 3:16-28) which famously vindicates true motherhood as love transcending empty rivalry, and which is treated by Girard as a key Biblical text (cf. Girard 1987, 237-249). In Hustvedt's novel, Lucille is cast in the role of the bad mother, whereas Bill (and by extension, Violet) is the good parent.

A further indication of Lucille's emphatic mimeticism is the impromptu one-night stand she has with Leo and which is perhaps motivated by her desire to rekindle her coquetry by proving to herself that she can inspire desire in a man who, though not her former husband, is very close to him. The mimetic nature of this tryst is evident in the fact that sexual desire quite obviously plays second fiddle to an altogether other kind of desire. Afterwards, Leo analyzes Lucille's motives, not yet seeing through his own:

Lucille had not wanted an affair; I felt quite sure of that. But she had wanted something from me. I say *something*, because whatever it was, it had merely taken the form of sex. The more I thought about it, the more troubling it became, because I began to suspect that the *something* was connected to Bill. (*WIL*, 99; italics in the original)

The mysterious "*something*" could be interpreted, in the light of mimetic theory, as Lucille's need to engage in a titillating drama of rivalry by positing herself as an object desired by both her former husband and his best friend. This would reveal Lucille as a kindred spirit of Desdemona, who, according to Girard's reading of *Othello*, is addicted to the rivalrous potential for "spectacles of violence" she detects in the men near her (cf. Girard 2004, 293). Unlike her Shakespearean counterpart, Lucille is not sequestered in a military base but in the ivory tower of an intellectual and art community; her would-be (and in Bill's case, former)



lovers are artists and scholars, not warriors. But as is evident in the adventures of a murder artist like Teddy Giles, or in the poisonous pen of a critic like Henry Hasseborg, it is a small difference indeed.

## 5 Mimetic Narrative as Allegory and Parody of Christian Discipleship

The following chapter will deal with mimetic relationships between characters that can be viewed as analogous to a teacher-disciple dynamic. This allegorical aspect, treated in the novels with no small amount of parody but not lacking earnestness either, sheds light on the religious and spiritual overtones of these secular texts,<sup>78</sup> and how these ‘tutelary’ tendencies are linked with the question of imitation.

In his interview with Girard in *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World*, Guy Lefort makes the point that, “Everything we know under the title of apprenticeship, education and initiation rests on [the] capacity for mimesis” (Lefort / cit. Girard 1987, 290). In both his magnum opus, *Things Hidden* and in his debut, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, Girard employs the term “disciple” more liberally than its New Testament equivalent would indicate. However, the Christian analogy is always there in the background, as is suggested by Girard’s introduction of the concept in the opening pages of *Deceit*, tied in specifically to his reading of *Don Quixote*, that most secular piece of classic literature:

Don Quixote has surrendered to Amadis the individual’s fundamental prerogative: he no longer chooses the objects of his own desire—Amadis must choose for him. The disciple [sic!] pursues objects which are determined for him, or at least seem to be determined for him, by the model of all chivalry. [...]. Chivalric existence is the *imitation* of Amadis in the same sense that the Christian’s existence is the imitation of Christ. (Girard 1976, 1-2; italics in the original)

The novel most explicitly employing the Gospel analogy in the study at hand is Spark’s *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*. The whole structure of its story is widely considered to parallel the New Testament story of Jesus. Like Jesus, Miss Brodie takes up her ‘ministry’ (in her case, a teaching post in a 1930’s Edinburgh school for girls), selects her ‘disciples’ (the six chosen girls in the so called “Brodie set”), and preaches her ‘gospel’ (her very own educational programme that is quite different from the one advocated by her more conventional colleagues and largely comprised of her personal example and life story; cf. Auerbach 1978, 169-170). Eventually she is betrayed by a Judas figure in the guise of former pupil Sandy Stranger and ‘crucified’ (i.e., forced into early retirement) by the Pharisee-like faculty with the headmistress Mackay acting as Caiaphas. Instead of being ‘resurrected,’ however, Miss Brodie spends her remaining life in a mental and spiritual limbo, cloaked in

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<sup>78</sup> It is interesting to note, that of the authors whose work is discussed here, Ian McEwan is an outspoken atheist, whereas the late Muriel Spark was a devout Christian convert and often associated with the other British Catholic novelists like Graham Greene and Evelyn Waugh.

self-pity and paranoia over her betrayal, the real perpetrator of which remains unknown to her (although she briefly includes Sandy in her list of the usual suspects).

With its ironic paralleling of Christ's relationship with his disciples and the hostile authorities pressing down on it, *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* is less analogous to than contrasted with the New Testament Gospel texts. What at first appear as affinities between Spark's novel and the Biblical accounts of the Passion, are more likely meant to be read as a form of parody. Miss Brodie is at heart an egotist who, instead of offering herself as a sacrifice for the salvation of others, is actually promoting the scapegoat mechanism (and not undoing it, as Jesus, according to Girard, does in the Gospels). This is proven, among other things, by her persecution of Mary Macgreggor. Moreover, she sends Joyce Emily Hammond on a suicidal 'mission.' A further indication of Miss Brodie's contrast to the Christian deity is her lack of foreknowledge, although she aspires to a kind of omniscience – and is thwarted in the process by Spark's narratological omniscience. As Frank Kermode remarks of the novel's eponym:

In plotting the careers of her élite girls she imitates the predestinarian God and goes wrong in the process: 'I do not think ever to be betrayed,' she boasts, and is as confident of her victory over her superiors as she is of the accuracy of her forecast for Sandy: 'I fear you will never belong to life's élite.' God, as we know by hindsight (a power freely conferred on us by Spark) has other plans, and a different idea of election. (Kermode 2004, xiv)

Miss Brodie's falling short of inerrancy is only human. However, her hubristic notion that she could predict the future events of her own life and others by sheer will-power betrays her super-human ambitions. And by that self-exaltation, she has succumbed to Satanic pride. While still in her eponymous prime, Miss Jean Brodie is not so much Christ-like as she is diabolical, ruling her pupils with an iron fist, dividing and conquering their minds through everyday acts of manipulation and seduction. Spark's novel is an allegory of the Passion, but as such it is a reverse mirror-image: a Gospel parody, albeit one that does not aim to ridicule the original, but, rather, highlight its thematic primacy.

Another text containing a parody of the Gospels of almost grotesque proportions, is Tartt's *The Secret History*. Julian Morrow, the Classics professor in the fictional Hampden College, tutors only a limited number of students (in fact, the same number, six, as of those included in the "Brodie set"). To these chosen ones, he not only teaches appreciation of Greek and Latin literature and knowledge of Greco-Roman history, but indoctrinates his students to adhere to Ancient modes of thought, as well. When he discovers the lengths to which his

devoted students have gone to in emulating his aesthetic textbook ideals, Julian embarrasses his former prize pupil Henry Winter, causing his suicide, and leaves his post. *The Secret History* thus reverses the Judas motif of *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*; now it is the Messiah figure who betrays his disciple (although, as in the case of Judas's betrayal of Jesus, it is still the disciple who commits suicide in Tartt's novel).

Unlike the hierarchical dynamic of Sandy's and Miss Brodie's relationship in Spark's novel, Tartt's mimetic rivals Henry and Richard begin their interaction on a more level battlefield, but in the end of the narratives, it is Richard who is more awe-struck by Henry's example than Sandy is with Miss Brodie's legacy.

Even in the novels much less concerned with religion and ideology, there can be found allusions to the theme of discipleship. It is hardly a coincidence, that the two sons in Hustvedt's *What I Loved* have the same names as the traditionally purported authors of two New Testament Gospels (Matthew and Mark, respectively).

The disciple motif is also linked with the question of evil and its highly contagious nature. All four novels in the corpus deal with the transmission of evil from one character to another; moreover, each has a character that somehow seems to incarnate evil in a very Satanic fashion. This latter trait seems to be at odds with Girard's theories, since for him Satan is not so much a personal force as a bodiless parasite, the spirit of mimetic crisis itself. Indeed, to call someone 'Satan' would be very much like scapegoating that person, an inclination much undermined by mimetic theory.<sup>79</sup> But as Girard also links the Biblical accounts of Satan with a power instigating violence through false accusations, the characters of Miss Brodie in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, Henry Winter in *The Secret History*, George Lane in *Amsterdam* and Teddy Giles in *What I Loved* could be said to be representations of Satan in a very Girardian way; Shadrack in *Sula* is a similar character (a Dionysiac instigator of a violent gathering), but he also has more sympathetic and charitable characteristics that counter-balance his Satanic features (compassion for the scapegoat figure, Sula, as well as a personal history of suffering in the killing fields of World War I). Even so, Shadrack is complicit in the violence that permeates the story world of Morrison's novel and engulfs many of its characters. This kind of ambivalence, however, would be consistent with Girard's thesis; one of the personas who on an occasion act 'Satanically' in the Gospels is the apostle Peter who, exactly the moment before tempting Christ to escape crucifixion has been complemented by

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<sup>79</sup> Indeed, in *The Scapegoat*, Girard remarks: "Satan could be said to incarnate mimetic desire were that desire not, by definition, disincarnate" (Girard 1989, 166). By the same token, the Biblical demons who represent the Satanic principle of false transcendence in its "inferior" "multiplicity" (ibid.) incarnate "the mimetic *disincarnation*" (Girard 1989, 180; italics in the original).

him for his lucid *imitatio Christi* (cf. Girard 2001, 33-34 ). For Girard, being Satanic is inseparable from being human. Invoking another apostle, Paul, Girard concludes that Satan is synonymous with the powers that keep cultural structures of sacrifice intact: “Satan is not an obscure god. It is the name of a decomposing structure, the very one that Saint Paul called ‘Powers and Principalities’”(Girard 2010, 103). The decomposition of sacrifice is what also makes Satan an agent of reciprocal violence and conflictual mimesis.

This post-sacrificial stage is also in evidence in the novels dealing with teacher-student interactions. Although *The Secret History* and *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* also put forward narratives of scapegoating, they are first and foremost texts about sacrificial meltdowns. The characters in these novels may nostalgically long for sacrificial hierarchies in the Nietzschean vein, but in an equally Nietzschean vein, they demonstrate a desire that is only possible in a society that has lost its stable external mediations and internalized mimetic desire to a degree that enables the subject to entertain moral transgression for its own sake.

The reader is in danger of falling into the same temptation through the implied author’s manipulation of audience sympathies. Joan Leonard astutely articulates the allure of Miss Brodie’s character in her doctoral dissertation on Spark’s novel: “The liberal reader approves of the eccentrically disruptive teacher, only to be shocked into the reality of what she is doing” (Leonard 1984, 135). It is not by chance that Girard, whose interest in the double binds involved in modern education has already been noted, emphasizes the pedagogic features of Satan, likening ‘him’ to “a very progressive and likeable educator” who initially makes his students feel like they have been “liberated” – until they meet their liberator again, this time as an obstacle on their path to fulfilment (Girard 2001, 32-33).

## 5.1 “...but few are chosen.”: Metaphysical Apprenticeship

“The Gospel According to John” contains an excerpt that expediently demonstrates the problems inherent in the interactions between the self and the Other, and it deals with the relationship between Jesus and John the Baptist, as spoken by the latter character. The relationship between these two men is hierarchical rather than symmetrical. John the Baptist employs a wedding metaphor, comparing Jesus to the bridegroom and himself to the bridegroom’s friend: a function we today would call that of ‘the best man.’ However, the metaphor is also deliberately ambivalent. On the one hand, the best man serves the groom (indeed, he is the ‘best’ servant). On the other hand, the best man is also the friend of the

groom (often, the ‘best’ friend, an epithet implying equal worth and reciprocal duties). Thus, the degree of hierarchy / symmetry inherent in the two men’s interaction is in urgent need of negotiation and definition. Despite the ambivalence, however, and with full knowledge of it, both John the Baptist as character and “John” (the Evangelist) as author seem to agree on the superior status of the groom:

You yourselves can testify that I said, “I am not the Messiah; I have been sent as his forerunner. It is the bridegroom to whom the bride belongs. The bridegroom’s friend, who stands by and listens to him, is overjoyed at hearing the bridegroom’s voice. This joy, this perfect joy, is now mine. As he grows greater, I must grow less.” (John 3: 28–30)

It seems that the vicious cycle of rivalry is broken before it has even had a chance to start spinning. The potentiality of conflict is nevertheless demonstrated by a triangular model; the three agents mentioned in John, namely the bridegroom’s friend, the bride and the bridegroom, call to mind Girard’s formulation of mimetic desire, the dynamic which also consists of three parties: the subject, the object and the mediator (cf. Girard 1976, 2). John the Baptist, however, refuses to play the part of the Messiah offered to him by his devoted followers and instead takes his proper place as the ‘best man’ of Jesus who, according to the New Testament text, is the true Messiah. John does not merely resist the powerful temptation of assuming superiority, but actively rejoices at his self-defined ‘inferiority.’ If John, like Jesus, has followers of his own, he is also a follower (or a forerunner, which in this case refers to the same role) himself when it comes to his relationship with Jesus. Nevertheless, Jesus – at least in this Biblical context – is not an ordinary man. The transcendence emanating from him is truly divine. However, this transcendently described relationship between two potentially symmetrical figures may be treated as a precedent to the immanent relationships that characterize contemporary fiction. In “The Gospel According to John,” John the Baptist manages to transcend the desire to pursue the bride and become the bridegroom. However, what about the other ‘best men’ (or ‘maids of honour’) who followed, and who populate more recent – and more secular – literature?

The literary genre of the novel as opposed to the books in the New Testament is permeated by secular thought. But because secularism, according to Girard, is in itself a product of the Judeo-Christian demystification of archaic religion, then by the same token, the novel is an inherently ‘Christian’ genre. However, because of their more recent advent, the novels such as those studied by Girard in *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel* (from the texts of Cervantes in the early seventeenth century to those of Proust in the early twentieth century),

are deeper immersed in the sacrificial meltdown and the ‘internalization’ of mimetic desire than are the Gospels. Therefore, in Girard’s novelistic examples, a best man or a maid of honour who is capable of sincerely rejoicing at the sight of his or her friend taking possession of the bride or the bridegroom has become an even rarer sight than in the first century when “The Gospel According to John” was written. It would follow, then, that the corpus of this dissertation, consisting of novels published between the early 1960’s and the early 2000’s, is even more concerned with mimetic crises than Girard’s own example texts.

Before moving on to the corpus of novels in the study at hand, let us briefly touch upon two other fictional treatments of the theme of teacher-student interaction that, in their miniature and taught narrative form, offer illuminating examples.

The first example is the popular tale “The Sorcerer’s Apprentice” the first variation of which was written by Lucian, and which has inspired many texts from a poem by Goethe to an animated film production by Disney. While the master sorcerer is away, his apprentice invokes magical powers to aid him in the mundane task of house cleaning. Unfortunately, once unleashed, the magic cannot be stopped or revoked, since the apprentice has yet to learn this particular skill. Just as the pupil is about to drown the house with cleaning water, the sorcerer returns and successfully breaks the spell and saves the day. The shamed pupil has learned the invaluable lesson about the apparently uncontested superiority of his master from whom there is still much to be learned. While the master seems to be without fault, the pupil is just not good enough, either with regard to skill (he is not in total command of his trade) or morality (he abuses his powers in a trivial way, because he is lazy and frivolous).

The second example is the novella “Apt Pupil” (1982) by Stephen King. The story concerns the relationship between a notorious Nazi war criminal living under a false name in a peaceful American suburb and a boy nextdoor who discovers his neighbour’s true identity and blackmails him into sharing titillating accounts of his involvement in the Jewish Holocaust. The art of committing murder, and more importantly, the *desire* to commit murder, is passed on from the older man to the boy, as the latter eventually becomes a mass murderer in his own right.

Whereas “The Sorcerer’s Apprentice” presents us with a case of good teacher versus poor student, in King’s story, on the other hand, we have a case of an evil teacher versus a pupil who is *too good* – or rather, too evil. This is not simply to say that the pupil is as evil as his mentor – though this too is an important issue – but that the pupil is *too much like* his mentor. Instead of merely borrowing aspects from his teacher’s character, the pupil ends up reproducing his very being. Theirs is a hierarchical relationship in the sense that the older man

serves as a model for the younger, much like in the classroom the teacher is a model for his or her students. But this hierarchical interaction gradually becomes more symmetrical, so that in the end the two men are turned into complete mirror images of each other. They are, in effect, doubles.

The two narratives just referenced are archetypal extremes with their explicit and almost didactical treatment of the struggle between good and evil as manifest in a master-disciple relationship. But both deal with the same issue that is especially vital in Spark's *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, namely the degree of educational imitation and the stability / instability of pedagogical hierarchy.

Spark's novel resembles King's novella in that the differences between the mentor figure and the apprentice figure are rapidly vanishing. Whereas the Sorcerer of the parable still retains his 'objective' distance from the pupil (his command of his 'objects,' the broom and the water bucket, is tangible in itself and evidently superior to that of his apprentice), in both "Apt Pupil" and *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, there are no more definable skills or discrete character traits to be transmitted from the teacher to the student. In the end of Spark's novel, Sandy admits to his interviewer, that her school days were influenced, not by any discernible ideological insights derived from the "literary," "political" or even "personal" realms, but from "a Miss Jean Brodie in her prime" (*PMJB*, 128). Although the reader is not allowed to glimpse in detail the contents of Sandy's bestselling popular psychology book, "The Transfiguration of the Commonplace," it does have a great deal to do with Sandy's relationship with Miss Brodie. Ironically, what Sandy has learned from her teacher, is her teacher's *self*.

This kind of educational irony is also related to Girard's formulation of mimetic desire. In many ways, education is synonymous with imitation. 'Always do what the teacher tells you' is a command which implies that after obeying – and in fact imitating – his teacher or master, the student or apprentice will eventually come to occupy the position of teacher or master himself. He will then have imitators and followers of his own who look up to him as role model and aspiration figure. This educational formula is implicit in the parable of "The Sorcerer's Apprentice"; were it not for the pupil's hubris of striving to prematurely take on his master's status, there is nothing in the pursuit itself that should be frowned upon: the pupil's day *will* come, as well it *should*. The mediation of desire between the Sorcerer and his apprentice belongs to what Girard would call the external sphere (the implicit danger of the internalization of the apprentice's desire having been successfully thwarted in the tale). Quite the opposite is true of King and Spark whose narratives deal with mimetic desire in its highly



internalized and ‘metaphysical’ stage. In their texts, the pupil desires the apparent omnipotence of being that his or her mentor embodies, and it is the desire of autonomous, transgressive and subjective existence that is itself the object of desire.

At the heart of the educational paradox of ‘teaching the teacher,’ as it were, lies a teacher who teaches self-reliance and freedom from imitation by offering himself as a model for self-reliance to be imitated. Spark’s *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* is one of the most famous English language novels of the twentieth century to be dealing with the phenomenon of education and mentorship. Spark’s novel challenges the idea of the teacher-student interaction as a smooth process of initiation into society or the eventual empowerment of the student. Miss Brodie’s ominous slogan is “Give me a girl at an impressionable age, and she is mine for life.” A rendition of the Jesuit motto “Give me the child until he is seven and I’ll give you the man” (a quote attributed to St. Francis Xavier), it is a sign of Christian guidance being perverted to serve a completely different deity: the self.<sup>80</sup>

Miss Brodie’s extreme subjectivism, or antinomianism, leads her pupils to absurd situations, as there are no formulaic or predetermined rules for what should be taught and why; she teaches “opinions as if they were facts” (Lodge 1986, 131<sup>81</sup>). Miss Brodie’s revelations about her own personal likes and dislikes are the only principles the pupils can measure up to – or at least try to:

Miss Brodie ushered the girls from the music room and, gathering them about her, said, ‘You girls are my vocation. [...]. I am dedicated to you in my prime. Form a single file, now, please, and walk with your heads up, *up*, like Sybil Thorndike, a woman of noble mien.’

Sandy craned back her head, pointed her freckled nose in the air and fixed her little pig-like eyes on the ceiling as she walked along in the file.

‘What are you doing, Sandy?’

‘Walking like Sybil Thorndike, ma’am.’

‘One day, Sandy, you will go too far.’

Sandy looked hurt and puzzled.

<sup>80</sup> In his article, “Calvinism and Catholicism in Muriel Spark” (1984), Alan Massie writes: “‘Give me a child of impressionable age, and she is mine for life’, Miss Brodie has said, in imitation of the Jesuits; and there is something Jesuitical, in the common sense of the word, in the way Sandy deals with her. ‘You’ll never get her for sex,’ she tells the headmistress, ‘try politics.’ Sandy knows that Miss Brodie’s politics are absurd, while her behaviour in sexual matters is corrupt, but, as she says, ‘I’m only interested in putting a stop to Miss Brodie.’ This is Jesuitical casuistry—the end justifies the means—and Mrs. Spark means us to realize it” (Massie 1984, 103). Massie does not emphasize that it is not just any end that justifies the means for Sandy, but the end of “putting a stop to Miss Brodie,” in effect, ending Miss Brodie.

<sup>81</sup> As an example of Miss Brodie’s subjective “facts,” Lodge quotes the excerpt of the novel, in which Miss Brodie asks her pupils who is the greatest Italian painter and, not satisfied with the answer “‘Leonardo da Vinci,’” corrects: “‘That is incorrect. The answer is Giotto, he is my favourite’” (cf. *PMJB*, 11).

‘Yes,’ said Miss Brodie, ‘I have my eye upon you, Sandy. I observe a frivolous nature. I fear you will never belong to life’s élite or, as one might say, the crème de la crème.’ (*PMJB*, 23; italics in the original)

As opposed to the Sorcerer’s apprentice who knows immediately where he has gone wrong once his master intervenes to correct him, Sandy has good cause for being “hurt and puzzled,” since her misdemeanour merely consists in following her teacher’s instructions verbatim. However, in the light of Gregory Bateson and Girard’s formulations of the ‘double bind’<sup>82</sup> these crossed signals make perfect sense, as “[t]he disciple can only be blamed for being the best of all disciples” (Girard 1987, 290). Sandy is too good a reproduction of, not only Sybil Thorndike, but also, through this shared idol, Miss Brodie herself, and therefore she needs to be corrected lest she’ll “go too far” and threaten the model’s autonomy. To apply Girard’s wording, Sandy’s imitation is “too perfect” (Girard 1987, 290).

Precisely because the child Sandy’s imitation of Miss Brodie is so perfect, the double bind hurts her so much, as she cannot identify the fault line. According to Girard, the double standard inherent in the model’s setting himself up as a model, while simultaneously barring the way to the gate he keeps, is especially brutal to the child who has yet to decipher the code of mimetic desire:

The child possesses no perspective that will allow him to see things as they are. He has no basis for reasoned judgements, no means of foreseeing the metamorphosis of his model into a rival. This model’s opposition reverberates in his mind like a terrible condemnation; he can only regard it as an act of excommunication. (Girard 2005, 157)

It is not by chance that Girard uses the congregational term of social punishment: “excommunication.” As Miss Brodie is the head priest(ess) of her group of followers, so for Sandy to be denied a bright future among “life’s élite,” would also be tantamount to being driven out of the community of true believers, the would-be enjoyers of paradisiacal bliss. What makes it even more painful for this erred sheep of the flock, is that her theological record is outwardly impeccable and she is unable to recant her heresies since there is no doctrinal fallacy to be pointed out to her, merely the vague “frivolousness” of her “nature.”

Imitation has always caused anxiety in culture, and according to Girard, archaic religion was conceived as a bulwark against the socially destructive rivalry mimetic desire inevitably

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<sup>82</sup> In *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World*, Girard cites Bateson’s *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1972) and *Naven* (Stanford University Press, 1972). Bateson is mentioned merely as the original coiner of the term ‘double bind’; Girard uses the term in a manner specific to his mimetic theory, and it is Girard’s adoption of it that is employed in the study at hand.

spawns. However, modern individualism and the romantic cult of spontaneous autonomy have added a new dimension to the fear of imitation; imitation is now discouraged even in those domains where it has served an explicit and structured purpose, namely apprenticeship and education (ibid.)

Children are in a special situation when it comes to imitation, since they embody the inconvenient truth about the universal importance of imitation for human survival and socialization. “Proportionally, humans spend the greatest amount of time in childhood compared to any other animal,” the developmental psychologist Bruce Hood reminds his readers. “This is not only so that we can learn from others, but also so we can learn to become like others” (Hood 2011, xii). But it is precisely the part about “*becoming like others*” that is much more difficult for the contemporary Western adult to acknowledge that the the part about “*learning from others*.” It is this fine line between having and being that places contemporary Western children in such a precarious position in relation to the family and, perhaps even more so, school.

According to Girard, what makes modern education even worse than previous pedagogic traditions, is the fallacy of spontaneous desire, “which is a purely mythological notion” and which has itself become the object of teaching (Girard 1987, 291). In Girard’s opinion our contemporary culture has more or less forsaken the old hierarchies such as social class divisions and the infallibility of religious authorities, and rightly so. But this equality, which is a good thing in itself, has a perverted side to it. This is because people all the same wish to distinguish themselves from others, and in the absence of *external* status, they attach a sense of prestige to *internal* characteristics of others. This way the reasons for admiring and imitating somebody become completely subjective and arbitrary, a virtual nothing – or anything. Whoever is thought of as possessing the necessary amount of personal charisma suddenly becomes an ideal model of identity – a God-like idol even. The irony is, of course, that the two parties of imitation – the model and the imitator – are fundamentally similar with each other. Not only are they both human, but in today’s world, luckily, they are more or less equal – at least compared to the former aristocracies and class societies. In *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, the schoolgirls do not look up to all their teachers, but only Miss Brodie, whose personal presence they find electrifying. So it is not her social standing or the position she occupies that commands authority. It is *herself*.

Internal mediation of desire is what mimetic desire for Girard is really about. Paisley Livingston has sought to clarify Girard’s theory by isolating the kind of imitation involved in this kind of internalized desire. According to Livingston, the desiring subject’s

[...] consistent and longstanding imitation of his [model] is motivated by his belief that this [person] embodies a range of virtues that are together fully definitive of the kind of identity he would like to create for himself. And it is this direct and enduring relationship to an idealized self-concept that is at the heart of personal mediation, which is thereby quite different from the purely instrumental relation to a person from whom one borrows relatively trivial means to ends that one has already determined for oneself. (Livingston 1992, 67)

Of the girls in the “Brodie set,” it is Sandy Stranger who is prone to the kind of “consistent and longstanding imitation” of a mentor described by Livingston, and it is she who eventually succumbs to a fully internalized mimetic desire towards Miss Brodie. While Miss Brodie’s memory lingers in the minds of the other girls as they reach adulthood (with Rose Stanley being the one notable exception; *PMJB*, 119), it is only Sandy who has allowed her former teacher to define her future, no matter how unconsciously.

Precisely because the external markers of age or professionalism no longer separate teachers and students, the teacher is equally vulnerable to mimetic desire. This is why Miss Brodie disapproves of Sandy’s efforts in imitating the actress Sybil Thorndike. Sandy has gone too far in blurring the boundaries between herself and her designated model and threatens the latter’s sense of selfhood. But of course, Miss Brodie is not really self-reliant herself, since she has models and idols of her own, including the said actress. Sandy is not imitating Sybil Thorndike because of any spontaneous recognition of the actress’s greatness. She is imitating Miss Brodie’s desire to imitate Sybil Thorndike. In the novel, Sybil Thorndike is only one in a series of famous women which Miss Brodie presents as idols for the girls. Others include Mary, Queen of Scots and Anna Pavlova.

The young Sandy’s mediators proliferate to the point of recalling the multitudes of rivals confronted by Dostoevsky’s Underground Man in the course of his mimetic adventures (“The underground man’s mediators succeed one another so rapidly we can no longer even speak of distinct selves”; Girard 1976, 91). These childhood role models include, in addition to Pavlova, the policewoman investigating a sexual exhibitionist who has targeted Jenny Gray, as well as Stevenson’s Alan Breck with whom Sandy is conducting imaginary conversations. These remote aspiration figures, however, are not so internalized as to be exactly rivals – and neither is, at this early point, Miss Brodie herself who enjoys a quite uncomplicated heroism in the eyes of Sandy and Jenny. The two girls use her as the protagonist of the many stories they write in their spare time. The heroism this fictionalized version of Miss Brodie exhibits

in the youthful romances of her devoted pupils is still more reminiscent of Amadis of Gaul in *Don Quixote* than of Zverkov et al. in *Notes from the Underground*.

Although they obviously hold a strong attraction to Miss Brodie, the legion of illustrious female role models are always reflected back on more internal models (especially the professional-turned-personal enemy sister, Miss Mackay whom Miss Brodie uses as a case for invidious comparison of models for her girls). When it comes to Sandy's mimetic endeavours, she appropriates her external models from Miss Brodie, while cleaving unto Miss Brodie as the source of internal mediation. Sandy's daydream about Pavlova is still more or less external, but it also marks a subtle point in slanting towards a more internal experience of mimetic desire:

'Sandy,' said Anna Pavlova, 'you are the only truly dedicated dancer, next to me. Your dying Swan is perfect, such a sensitive, final tap of the claw upon the floor of the stage...'

'I know it,' said Sandy (in considered preference to 'Oh, I do my best'), as she relaxed in the wings.

Pavlova nodded sagely and gazed into the middle distance with the eyes of tragic exile and of art. 'Every artist knows,' said Pavlova, 'is it not so?' Then, with a voice desperate with the menace of hysteria, and a charming accent, she declared, 'I have never been understood. Never. Never.'

Sandy removed one of her ballet shoes and cast it casually to the other end of the wings where it was respectfully retrieved by a member of the common chorus. Pausing before she removed the other shoe, Sandy said to Pavlova, 'I am sure I understand you.'

'It is true,' exclaimed Pavlova, clasping Sandy's hand, 'because you are an artist and will carry on the torch.' (*PMJB*, 63)

It is clear from this imagined interaction between the celebrated ballerina and Sandy as her would-be torchbearer, that Sandy is fantasizing about an idealized apprenticeship that simultaneously recognizes the superlative powers of the mentor and the exquisite potential of the prize pupil; indeed, the latter has every reason to equal the former – but only after the teacher's prime has run its natural course, after which there is no cause for symmetrical rivalry between her and her student. Pavlova, sufficiently removed from any possible contact with a non-celebrity like Sandy, is like the fictional Amadis in *Don Quixote*: a rigidly external model who is in no position to spread mimetic contagion onto those 'fans' who admire her from a safe distance (cf. Girard 1976, 7-8). However, when Sandy applies her ideal to learning from Miss Brodie, she immediately collides against a double bind and is reprimanded for being too quick a study. Ironically, this chastisement is brought about by Sandy's imitation of a very external model (like Pavlova) of Sybil Thorndike who is supposed to serve

as aspiration figure for everybody in the Brodie class, including Miss Brodie herself. By putting her imitative aspirations openly on display, the still innocently ‘external’ Sandy has revealed her teacher’s mimetic desire which is more ‘internal’; the double bind encounter that follows this faux pas embarrasses Sandy and marks a milestone in her personal development. She now proceeds to internalize and hide her asceticized<sup>83</sup> imitation – with far-reaching consequences for both her and her teacher’s later lives.

Nina Auerbach (1978, 169-171) has pointed out that the relationship between Miss Brodie and her group of favourite pupils echoes the Early Christian metaphor in which the congregation of believers is likened to a body whose head is Christ, with the lesser organs functioning under his orders to form an organic whole (cf. 1Cor.12:27 and Eph. 3:6). Miss Brodie’s pupils each have a special gift that sets her apart from the other girls while reflecting different sides of Miss Brodie’s personality. For example, Eunice is the athletic one, Monica the mathematical one, Rose the sexy one. It is only Sandy, who seems to reflect the whole being of her teacher, and this is perhaps why Miss Brodie at one point fatally rebukes her.

The most important difference between Jesus and Miss Brodie is that the latter does not sacrifice her life for her disciples but on the contrary causes one of her followers, a girl called Joyce Emily Hammond, to volunteer in the Spanish Civil War; Joyce Emily is killed on her way to the battlefield. Later it turns out she was going to fight on Franco’s side, and not, as would have been politically correct, on the Loyalist side. Sandy reports Miss Brodie’s Fascist leanings to the headmistress who is only too glad to see Miss Brodie go. Ironically, Sandy now imitates the headmistress’s desires, since both women are resentful of Miss Brodie. It seems Sandy is always caught up in mimetic desire, whatever she does.

As for her new relegation to victim status, Miss Brodie is far from omniscient as to who in her flock was the black sheep. In a dizzying vortex of masochistic resentment she suspects every girl in turn:

I think first of Mary Macgregor. Perhaps Mary has nursed a grievance, in her stupidity of mind, against me – she is such an exasperating young woman. I think of Rose. It may be that Rose resented my coming first with Mr L. Eunice – I cannot think it could be Eunice, but I did frequently have to come down firmly on her commonplace ideas. She wanted to be a Girl Guide you remember. She was attracted to the Team Spirit – could it be that Eunice bore a grudge? Then there is Jenny. Now you know Jenny, how she went *off* and was never the same after she wanted to be an actress. She became so dull. Do you think she minded my telling her that she would

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<sup>83</sup> Hiding one’s mimetic desire is something Girard calls “the hero’s askesis” (cf. the chapter title in Girard 1976, 153): “Every desire that is revealed can arouse or increase a rival’s desire; thus it is necessary to conceal desire in order to gain possession of the object” (ibid.).

never be a Fay Compton, far less a Sybil Thorndike? Finally, there is Monica. I half incline to suspect Monica. There is very little Soul behind the mathematical brain, and it may be that, in a fit of rage against that Beauty, Truth and Goodness which was beyond her grasp, she turned and betrayed me. (*PMJB*, 126; italics in the original)

To carry her paranoia and megalomania even further, Miss Brodie engages in theological speculation about God having intervened to punish Mary Macgregor personally for her suspected betrayal (“‘If this is a judgement on poor Mary for betraying me, I am sure I would not have wished...’”; *PMJB*, 127).

Ironically, the real Judas is the one she has continued to treat as a kind of John, the most ‘beloved’ disciple closest to her bosom. In a letter to the adult Sandy, Miss Brodie exonerates her because “you had no reason to betray me” (*PMJB*, 126). Miss Brodie’s compliment to Sandy reads also as an insult of sorts, since by relegating her as “the best part” (*ibid.*) of herself, Miss Brodie is also denying Sandy’s autonomy. Miss Brodie thus acts as a kind of Führer to her Fascist underling, simultaneously empowering and diminishing her.

Miss Brodie’s semi-Fascist political stance is a logical consequence of her fierce individualism, which echoes Nietzsche’s Superman fantasy. She constantly exclaims that she is “in her prime” and that her students are “the crème de la crème.” The paradox of individualism is much like the paradox of education: in order to become independent and self-sufficient, one must first imitate independence and self-sufficiency as represented by a model. This is the highly ironic logic of the collective psychosis that is Fascism, according to both Girard’s theories and Spark’s fiction. The character Joyce Emily is willing to sacrifice her life for Miss Brodie, whose desires she is imitating, just like the Nazis were willing to share in the destructive fantasies of Hitler (afterwards claiming they were only following his orders). It is not a coincidence that Miss Brodie’s “prime” coincides with the 1930’s heyday of Fascism. The mimetic model-obstacle as defined by Girard is absurdly a model of someone who is in no need of models. Miss Brodie claims she is cultivating and refining the personalities of her students, merely “leading out” (as in playing *Il Duce*) the qualities already present. But she is really just mirroring her own image in the girls.

Miss Brodie’s jealous possessiveness over her girls is juxtaposed not only with Fascism, but also with symmetrical groups of girls who adhere to a ‘leadership’ that parallels her authority over the “Brodie set.” In addition to the lamentably “team spirit”-infested girls outside the Brodie set whom Miss Brodie happily abandons to Miss Mackay, there are extra-curricular activities such as the girl scouts who as a rule organize together in the same manner

as students in a school, soldiers in an army, or worshippers in a congregation. As a child Sandy is already fascinated by the magic of social cohesion, and she sees the parallels between different groups with precocious clarity:

It occurred to Sandy, there at the end of the Middle Meadow Walk, that the Brodie set was Miss Brodie's fascisti, not to the naked eye, marching along, but all knit together for her need in another way, marching along. That was all right, but it seemed, too, that Miss Brodie's disapproval of the Girl Guides had jealousy in it, there was an inconsistency, a fault. Perhaps the Guides were too much of a rival fascisti, and Miss Brodie could not bear it. Sandy thought she might see about joining the Brownies. Then the group fright seized her again, and it was necessary to put the idea aside, because she loved Miss Brodie. (*PMJB*, 31-32)

Not only does Sandy recognize the affinities between a supposedly disparate collective formation of prepubescent girls (the affinity between the Brodie set and the Girl Guides is loudly denied by Miss Brodie's sarcastic remark: "'For those who like that sort of thing,' said Miss Brodie in her best Edinburgh voice, 'that is the thing they like'"; *PMJB*, 31), she also links these formations with contemporary Fascist politics. Even so, Sandy's "insight" (the one attribute Miss Brodie grants her, even though only when she is well in her teens) does not save her from succumbing to Miss Brodie's Il Duce-like personality cult. The feminine and child-like community of the "Brodie set" is not a contrast to the more adult and masculine world of history, religion and politics, but, like Patricia Waugh poignantly states, its analogy: "[...] the trivial pursuits of schoolgirls carry the much weightier symbolism of the proprieties of Calvinistic Edinburgh and the sinister resonances of Fascistic uniformity" (Waugh 2010, 86).

What is supremely ironic about Miss Brodie's loud disapproval of a rival group is her own set's similarity to it. Sandy, in her relative innocence, views Miss Brodie's antagonism as "an inconsistency" and "a fault," since it would make more sense to embrace a group that is so obviously identical with one's own. But no sooner has Sandy paused to consider Miss Brodie's apparent inconsistency than she acknowledges the mimetic motives that actually make perfect sense ("Perhaps the Guides were too much of a rival fascisti, and Miss Brodie could not bear it."). Thus Sandy instinctively realizes the mimetic paradox, namely, that conflict is born out of radical sameness, not radical difference.

Although less easy to categorize visually than the uniform-clad brownies and Girl Guides, the members of the Brodie set are nevertheless "immediately recognizable as Miss Brodie's pupils" (*PMJB*, 5). The mark they bear as a group belonging to a specific leader is less external, having mostly to do with what they know as opposed to the rest of the pupils who



are trained in “the authorized curriculum” (ibid.). Indeed the only way the Brodie girls set themselves visually apart from the other Marcia Blaine girls, is the individualized manner they wear their panama hats:

[Monica Douglas] wore her panama hat rather higher on her head than normal, perched as if it were too small and as if she knew she looked grotesque in any case.

[...]. [Rose Stanley’s] hat was placed quite unobtrusively on her blonde short hair, but she dented in the crown on either side.

Eunice Gardiner [...] had the brim of her hat turned up at the front and down at the back.

Sandy Stranger wore it turned up all round and as far back on her head as it could possibly go; to assist this, she had attached to her hat a strip of elastic which went under the chin. Sometimes Sandy chewed this elastic and when it was chewed down she sewed on a new piece. [...].

[...]. [Jenny Gray] wore her hat with the front brim bent sharply downwards [...]. (*PMJB*, 6-7)

The panama hat motif is important enough to act as part of the introduction to the girls and their respective “talents.” In this sense it is revealing, that Sandy as future Judas chews on the elastic chord she has attached to her hat, as if this action singles her out as a devouring predator or a consuming parasite. Also, the scapegoat Mary does not have a distinctive way about her posturing with the panama hat and thus has her agency erased by exclusion, although she is later included in the group portrait painted by Mr Lloyd (“a group [...] wearing their panama hats in a different way, each hat adorning in a different way, each hat adorning, in a magical transfiguration, a different Jean Brodie under the forms of Rose, Sandy, Jenny, Mary, Monica and Eunice.; *PMJB*, 111).

“Clothes are important commodities in the Sparkian world,” Patricia Waugh notes, “for in a culture where the aesthetic so often stands in for the ethical, the fetishization of items of clothing confers on them a kind of tantric or sacramental power in spite and because of the secular regime” (Waugh 2010, 85). Nevertheless, it is hardly a coincidence that Miss Brodie’s mark on her girls is so obviously less visually discernible than the uniforms worn by schoolgirls and girl scouts; her influence on her wards is more metaphysical than physical, more ethereal than visual. According to Girard, extreme materialism and mechanical inaniminity can also function as a compensation for a spiritual void that metaphysical desire is by definition unable to fill (Girard 1976, 286).

The narrative of *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* is told in a non-linear fashion, and Spark’s novel is famous for employing the flash-forward technique. This together with the God-like presence of the third-person omniscient narrator provides the reader with a certain

distance in relation to the story and characters. We know from early on that Sandy Stranger ends up as a nun in a Catholic convent. The convent is also the setting of the novel's final sequence. After betraying Miss Brodie and causing her professional and personal downfall, Sandy has become a bestselling author of a popular psychology book, and her fans visit her at the convent. One man asks about her main influences in life. "Were they literary or political or personal [...]?" he asks, and Sandy replies: "'There was a Miss Jean Brodie in her prime'" (*PMJB*, 128). The ending is a recap of an earlier episode in the beginning of the novel, and it is obvious that the whole text converges on this meeting and the articulation of a special relationship it prompts.

The narrative style and structure of *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* is viewed by some critics as related to her Christian themes; it is as if her third-person 'omniscience' and effortless shifts of time via *prolepses*<sup>84</sup> render her narrator God-like (cf. Bower 1990, 489). However, Spark's contemporaries in the so called Catholic school of British fiction, Evelyn Waugh and Graham Greene, employ completely different narrative strategies (e.g., first-person narration that results in confessional tones) and are no less Christian because of it. Rather than 'omniscience' *per se* (and in the manner the concept has come under attack by, among others, Jonathan D. Culler in his 2004 article), Spark's perspective-shifting and timeline-hopping narrator strives to illuminate the fact that there are other consciousnesses existing and personal histories unraveling which escape the individualistic obsessions of the mimetic rivals, Miss Brodie and Sandy. To implement a highest authority (God-like or not) that hierarchically supersedes the story world characters and counteracts their subjective experience with an overarching objectivity is tantamount to demonstrating how everything is interconnected in the narrative universe.

"The heresy with which Muriel Spark peculiarly concerns herself is solipsism," writes Alan Massie (1984, 100). According to Massie's reading of *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, Sandy is made to recognize her teacher's dark side through observing the latter's grandiose self-absorption disguised as pedagogic altruism:

Jean Brodie seems at first to offer her charges, of whom Sandy is one, a life-enhancing freedom. She poses as daringly unconventional. But that first impression, as Sandy comes to realize, is false: 'she has elected herself to grace.' So the novel becomes an exposure of metaphysical evil. [...].

[...] Miss Brodie turns out to be [...] prepared to destroy innocence to flesh out her fantasy world, eager to incite others to acts she dare not commit herself. She is

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<sup>84</sup> Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan uses Spark's novel as a narratological textbook example of omniscient prolepsis (Rimmon-Kenan 2002, 49).

wilfully and blindly ignorant of the significance of her actions; self-absorbed, she has no conception of others. She has never come to terms with what she boasts of having rejected, for she lives only in her own mind. (Massie 1984, 102)

While shrewdly demystifying the heroism of the teacher and revealing her fierce independence extolled by some other readers<sup>85</sup> as mere egomania, Massie is at the same time much too soft on the motivation of the student. Although Massie maintains that Sandy has selfish reasons for her betrayal of Miss Brodie, he accredits this selfishness with an integrity in fighting oppressive authority, whether religious or educational: “[Sandy] has used Miss Brodie to free herself of something more than Miss Brodie, of the brooding weight of Calvinism that has oppressed her childhood” (Massie 1984, 103). It seems that Massie is attributing Sandy with a sense of objectivity that she expressly lacks, for she is much less plagued by religious authority (which is external in Girard’s sense of the word) than by Miss Brodie’s personal magnetism (which, again in Girard’s sense, is internal).<sup>86</sup> Although Sandy does equate the Calvinist doctrine of predestination with Miss Brodie’s arrogant proclamations of having elected her pupils to live a life of privilege and prestige (“She thinks she is Providence, thought Sandy, she thinks she is the God of Calvin, she sees the beginning and the end”; *PMJB*, 120), the Calvinist church does not play the role of prime antagonist (nor is the Catholic equivalent her prime protagonist, as her impetus to join it results from a displacement of mimetic rebellion against the fiercely anti-Catholic Miss Brodie). Therefore I would also disagree with Joan Leonard, whose 1984 dissertation claims that “Sandy’s betrayal of Brodie is, first of all, a tangible expression of her vague reactions against Calvin and Calvinism” (Leonard 1984, 138) and rather maintain the primacy of Miss Brodie’s influence on Sandy and stress her complicity in the mimetic desire her teacher inspires in her. It is true that Sandy in her mind at times reduces Miss Brodie’s grandiose promises to her pupils to the Calvinist doctrine of predestination. But Calvinism, or any other theology or ideology for that matter, never assumes a metaphysical status that in Sandy’s eyes could compete with the very being of Miss Brodie.

<sup>85</sup> The commercial ‘blurb’ on the back cover of the edition used in this study rather coyly characterizes the titular character as “an unbridled schoolmistress with advanced ideas.” This editorial infatuation with the novel’s eponym further proves the point already made by Benilde Montgomery: “[...] most critics, like Sandy herself, become obsessed only with the character of Jean Brodie and thereby misread the novel as only a character sketch of her” (Montgomery 2012, 97).

<sup>86</sup> Massie seems to make a mistake in his reading of Sandy’s attitude to the Calvinism of her Scottish surroundings; Sandy’s mother is English, not Scottish, and Sandy feels deprived of a cultural tradition that her Edinburgh peers take for granted, namely the Reformed Church (in this way, too, she is a “stranger,” as her name implies; cf. Rimmon-Kenan 2002, 68-69). In fact, Sandy retrospectively longs for a Calvinist upbringing she has missed out on, because at least in this way she would have “something definite to reject” (*PMJB*, 108).

What the implied author, through the employment of the ‘omniscient’ narrator would like the characters to do is to transcend both the bygone external authorities (religion in its institutional and national sense) that strive to curtail rivalry by serving as social constraints *and* the equally fallacious individualist aspirations of internally mediated mimetic desire (personal charisma). Institutional conservatism and individualist anarchism are both illusions; moreover they are the two sides of the same ‘mimetic’ coin. The truth lies in the Christian *message* of the church (for Spark’s implied author, preferably the Catholic one), not with its cultural conventions. And the Christian message for Spark (as it is for Girard) is tantamount to the revelation of other selves outside one’s self. Writing about the central character of another Spark novel, *The Girls of Slender Means* (1963), Massie summarizes the Catholic conversion according to the author’s criteria: “He accepts a reality independent of his own being, and so he recognizes objective standards of right and wrong” (Massie 1984, 105). Nicholas Farrington, the anarchist intellectual turned Jesuit missionary martyr in *The Girls of Slender Means*, achieves the conversion that still eludes Sandy in the end of *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, although, after her openly admitting the influence Miss Brodie exercised over her in the past, she is now within its reach.<sup>87</sup>

I would not so much stress the omniscience of Spark’s narrator (or lack thereof), but rather the implied issue of objectivity versus subjectivity of the characters’ world view as contrasted with the one propagated by the implied author through ‘her’ use of narration. Spark’s fictional project is similar to Girard’s theoretical one in the sense that they seek to demystify both individualist romanticisms with their delusional solipsism and the rigorous social conventions that only strive to postpone the inevitable existential crisis of the subject’s having to decide between loving or hating one’s neighbor – despite the company he or she keeps.

## **5.2 The Gospel According to Judas: The Abuse of Authority and the Symmetry of Betrayal**

In his essay, “The Uses and Abuses of Omniscience: Method and Meaning in Muriel Spark’s *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*” (1971/1986), David Lodge writes that “[...] the assessment of

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<sup>87</sup> In Massie’s view, Sandy Stranger and Nicholas Farrington both go through an orthodox (in the Catholic and Sparkian sense) conversion experience (Massie 1984, 101-102). I would disagree, since Sandy’s conversion is much more ambiguous than that of the martyred Nicholas.

Miss Brodie is, in the final analysis, an ethical and theological matter, not merely an educational one" (Lodge 1986, 135).

Lodge thinks it strangely paradoxical, that Sandy, being so intent on sabotaging Miss Brodie as she is, should simultaneously "have the keenest appreciation of Miss Brodie's positive worth" (ibid.). From a mimetic point of view, however, there is nothing strange about a subject being in awe of her model while at the same time resenting her violently.

Lodge also seems oblivious to Sandy's lingering romanticism, which, though no longer finding outlet in sentimental writing exercises with Jenny Gray as in her preteen years (Lodge reminds us that the girls bury their *Jane Eyre* pastiche about Miss Brodie in a cave; Lodge 1986, 133), nevertheless parallels that of her teacher (whom Lodge attributes with an infantilism that Sandy manages to grow out of; ibid.). To counter Lodge, it could be argued, rather, that the adult Sandy's mimetic desire has reached such intensity, that the hero worship evident in her juvenile fantasies has given way to a "*ressentiment*" that, in its "clandestine and terroristic" quality bears resemblance to Cassius's conspiracy in *Julius Caesar* (cf. Girard 2004, 187). Nor has Sandy's reason for informing on Miss Brodie to Miss Mackay anything to do with moral outrage concerning the gullible Joyce Emily's sad fate (as Lodge suggests; 1986, 134); her motivation for "putting a stop to Miss Brodie" is just that: annihilating Miss Brodie *herself* (and not her "irresponsible egotism"; Lodge, ibid.). Sandy herself says as much in her final audience with Miss Mackay. When the headmistress remarks to Sandy, with more than a hint of sarcasm, that she is "delighted" at her student's solemn interest in "the state of world affairs" (*PMJB*, 125), Sandy replies curtly: "I'm not really interested in world affairs [...] only in putting a stop to Miss Brodie'" (ibid.).<sup>88</sup> It is Miss Brodie that Sandy is after, not the future *Generalissimo* Franco.

The reader should take Sandy at her word. Miss Mackay certainly does, and Sandy speaks the language of mimetic rivalry that both characters understand. As the Caiaphas figure of the story, Miss Mackay understands exactly what Sandy-as-Judas gets out of her thirty pieces of silver. Unlike her Gospel counterpart, however, Sandy does not hang herself, but lives to contemplate the legacy of her betrayal.

How Sandy comes to view her betrayal has been subject to varying interpretations the emphases of which are often disparate. Lodge and Massie, for example, stress the theological dimension, whereas Nina Auerbach is more readily informed by literary history and gender

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<sup>88</sup> I agree with David Lodge in that Miss Brodie's political aloofness dwarfs any real engagement she might have with real world issues (Lodge 1986, 133-134). However, I would disagree with Lodge's interpretation of Sandy being compelled by her social conscience to inform on Miss Brodie. If not as uncritical of Fascism as Miss Brodie, Sandy is far from a committed and compassionate political thinker.

studies. Moreover, these critics tend to take sides between Miss Brodie and Sandy, with an implicit inclination of unearthing the real heroine (or villainess) of Spark's text. One important aspect that mimetic theory has to contribute to the argument is to offer an interpretation that would emphasize the similarity of the two characters' positions; also, perhaps more controversially (considering Auerbach's viewpoint), mimetic theory would de-emphasize the gender bias of the novel by showing how the mimetic dynamics of the relationship between the schoolmistress and the schoolgirl are not really all that much at variance with the male world of Fascist dictators or religious leaders.

Also, mimetic theory would certainly do justice to the Christian dimension of the novel. This dimension has sometimes been downplayed by critics who associate Spark's Catholicism with an embarrassing social conservatism (in this manner, too, Spark and Girard are similar), such as was the case more explicitly with that other avowedly Christian writer, T.S. Eliot (cf. Waugh 2010, 80-81). However, one can hardly dispute the sheer presence of Christianity in a novel like *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, which explicitly employs the metaphor of discipleship, religious conversion, and denominational differences in theological dogma. Furthermore, to bluntly equate Christianity (Catholic or Protestant) with right-wing conservatism is to seriously limit the scope of a work that commits to such a minute analysis of the interconnections between politics, religion and psychology.

The most expedient value of Girard's theory to Spark's novel, however, is not merely Christian thematic *per se*, but the way Christianity is connected with interpersonal dynamics. What Girard calls 'interindividual psychology' is inseparable from his somewhat controversial preference of Christianity over other religions and his opposition to the contemporary cult of personal autonomy – an autonomy that is based on a dishonest repression of factual imitation of the Other. The flipside of this megalomaniacal self-divinization is the persistence of collective cliques that practice a perverted form of Matthew's Great Commission, namely by excluding potential disciples rather than embracing them. In the deviated transcendence of the secular identity project, it seems, initiation has replaced conversion, while tangible love is replaced by the elusive pursuit of prestige. Initiation, for example into a prestigious group (such as the "Brodie set" in Spark), is not only very 'modern,' but also a throwback to archaic cultures with their magical rivalries: "Each is concerned with acquiring the prestige that threatens to devolve upon the other and so with becoming the magical power—analogue to the Polynesian *mana* and the Greek *kudos* [...]" (Oughourlian / cit. Girard 1987, 304-305). Miss Brodie's "prime" is this kind of magical power that is more reminiscent of archaic religion than with Judeo-Christian theology.

David Lodge has pointed out this theme of idolatrous travesty of the Christian congregation in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*:

Buried in this largely comic novel there is a severe dogmatic message: that all groups, communions and institutions are false and more or less corrupting except the one that is founded on the truths of Christian orthodoxy—and even that one is not particularly attractive or virtuous. (Lodge 1986, 135)

Lodge more cautiously echoes Girard's Christian anthropology in which the Kingdom is the only social sphere free of mimetic rivalry (cf. Girard 2010, 46), although Lodge restricts his hypothesis to the Kingdom's earthly reflection, namely the very human and flawed churches and congregations. However, Spark's text is also critical of the motivation behind Sandy's conversion. Because Sandy's choice of church is a reaction against Miss Brodie, her Christian dedication is ironically born out of idolatry.

According to Nina Auerbach, there is in Spark's novel a tension between an "organic and preordained" (Auerbach 1978, 169) community and the chaotic forces that constantly threaten its very existence. This tension is largely compatible with Girard's conception of the sacrificial crisis and its apocalyptic acceleration in a post-Crucifixion world, with its apocalyptic ethos spread globally, eradicating local-cultural archaisms.<sup>89</sup> Of the two Christian denominations waging a battle for the soul of Sandy Stranger, Catholicism, in its ideal form at least, can point to a transcendent Kingdom without harmonious sacrifice or destructive rivalry, whereas Calvinism, with its "preordained" rigour, is bound to a more immanent level and can thus be used by ordinary humans like Miss Brodie for their own 'deviated' purposes.<sup>90</sup>

When Nina Auerbach writes that Miss Brodie is a "female god" [...] whose primacy is dangerous precisely because it is immortal [...]" (Auerbach 1978, 185), she rather misses the point of the teacher's factual immanence that lurks beneath her anti-Christian veneer of deviated transcendence.

<sup>89</sup> The global nature of Miss Brodie as "a collective creation" (Auerbach 1978, 169) and "the head of a mystical body" (Auerbach 1978, 171) is accentuated by Nina Auerbach when she writes that "[a]s [Miss Brodie's] life is history, so her body is geography" (ibid.). Auerbach refers to Miss Brodie's cosmopolitanism as evident in the many trips abroad she takes, but also to her paradoxical locality and her ability to incarnate the spirit of Edinburgh (ibid.).

<sup>90</sup> The schism between Calvinism and Catholicism in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* is frequently marked by critics (e.g., Massie 1984). According to Gerard Carruthers, "[i]t is in this subtle but profound difference between an extreme Calvinism and orthodox Catholic belief that the warp and woof of *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* lies. The crude predetermined drama of the former and the endless story of the latter where the battle between good and evil is never done and is never entirely predictable (an often surprising conflict that is the mark of so much of Spark's fictional oeuvre) makes for the essential difference" (Carruthers 2010, 35).

Auerbach does not deny that the gendered binary opposition of male versus female communality is problematic, but she is rather dualistic in separating the latter from the former. For Auerbach, “[...] all-male communities” [as opposed to all-female ones such as the Brodie set] usually possess indisputable magnitude and significance” (1978, 7), whereas “[...] female communities [...] must create their own, somewhat quirky and grotesque authority [...]” (1978, 8). One could contend, however, that clear-cut distinctions are false, since, firstly, male communities are not all that noble, and secondly, the female communities of Spark are fatally flawed, if not downright Satanic (a fact that Auerbach partly admits to, but also partly admires – and thus fails to completely demystify). To mention but two of the fictional male communities mentioned by Auerbach, the whaling ship *Pequod* and the knightly Round Table, respectively: The eponymous Moby-Dick is for Melville an empty symbol of prestige, an image of a nihilistic quest without a tangible object manifested in Ahab’s blind hatred – the epitome of Girard’s mimetic desire –, while the Grail of Arthurian legend also can be perceived in ways of varying integrity, as exemplified in the story of the Fisher King whose prestige-obsessed eyes are opened through Percival’s very real charity.

Apart from Miss Brodie’s diabolical influence on her students, Sandy’s predatory stance in relation to the teacher is a further indication of the ‘Satanic’ quality underlying the master-disciple interaction within the “Brodie set”. Sandy stalks Miss Brodie as her prey – the prey she seeks to annihilate (“put a stop to”). The irony is that, just like the usurper becomes the monarch he has toppled, the predator becomes the prey she has devoured; Sandy is filled by the substance that is Miss Brodie. The motif of being possessed by the demonized Other (the state Girard calls the “monstrous double”) could be detected in the metaphorically, as well as physically, small eyes of Sandy that are described as “pig-like.” The pigs, or swine, are, of course, the animals into which Jesus drives the demon spirits after exorcizing them from a man, who after the multitude of demons inhabiting him, is called “Legion” (Luke 8: 27-36). This Gospel affinity between Sandy and the demon-possessed swine is noted by Gerard Carruthers (2010, 34).<sup>91</sup> Sandy, who initially lacks any discernible talent, or “fame,” seeks agency from destroying Miss Brodie whose whole being she has come to reproduce as opposed to mere aspects of it that are scattered in the other Brodie girls. It is telling that Sandy’s eyes are the main cause of her fame in the Brodie set – or rather notoriety: “She was merely notorious for her small, almost non-existent, eyes, but she was famous for her vowel

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<sup>91</sup> In his article, “‘Fully to Savour Her Position’: Muriel Spark and Scottish Identity” (2010), Gerard Carruthers writes: “In a received image that goes at least as far as Christ driving the demon into a herd of swine in the Gospel of Luke (9:33), she [=Sandy] is seen to have pig-like eyes. In another porcine comparison, Sandy extracts from Lloyd his Catholic ‘religion as a pith from a husk’ (123)” (Carruthers 2010, 34).



sounds which, long ago in the long past, in the Junior school, had enraptured Miss Brodie” (*PMJB*, 7). So Sandy is famous, after all, the narrator concedes, but her vowel sounds do not encapsulate her in the same empowering way as Eunice Gardiner is encapsulated by “her spritely gymnastics and glamorous swimming” (*ibid.*), nor do they make her a force to be reckoned with in the manner that Monica Douglas is singled out by “her anger which, when it was lively enough, drove her to slap out to right and left” (*PMJB*, 6).

The emphasis on Sandy’s eyes and their “porcine” connection to the subject of possession could also be linked to the age-old motif of the ‘evil eye.’ In his book, *Male Envy: The Logic of Malice in Literature and Culture* (1999), Mervyn Nicholson suggests that the connection between the evil eye and envy is underreported; while the evil eye is often discussed on its own, envy remains a taboo subject, even though the evil eye is an obvious extension of envy (Nicholson 1999, 2). Though Nicholson’s discourse on envy stands on its own, he makes an allowance for Girard’s insight that “[e]nvy is the hardest sin to acknowledge” (Girard 1991<sup>92</sup>/cit. Nicholson 1999, 2). Ironically, for Nicholson’s deliberate gender bias (also evident in his title), Sandy, permeated by an ethos of envy and embodying the evil eye, is female.

The motif of deviated transcendence is a staple in Spark’s oeuvre, as Massie astutely notes when he writes about the author’s characters who turn out to be false idols for their fellow beings. Massie stresses, that Spark’s theology is not so much critical of atheism – the lack of transcendence – but of a kind of paganism – a false sense of transcendence:

It is a false religion, not the absence of religion, that is the vilest temptation. [...]. It is not enough, we see, to forget self; it depends on where you lose it. False Gods stalk through the novels. Jean Brodie whores after them; this is her heresy, her sin, the sin against the Holy Ghost, to say that that which is, is not, and that which is not, is. (Massie 1984, 99)

Cesáreo Bandera, a scholar deeply influenced by Girard’s mimetic theory, also speaks of the literary treatment of implicit idolatry and is even more concise in his definition than Girard himself is:

Idolatry is much more than a mistaken belief; it is the very embodiment of the anti-Christian, the Antichrist. In a way, it is Christianity upside down: instead of an innocent God who dies in place of a guilty human being, idolatry offers a bloodthirsty god who demands the killing of an innocent human being. (Bandera 1994, 230)

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<sup>92</sup> The quote is from Girard’s book on Shakespeare. The edition Nicholson refers to is *A Theatre of Envy: William Shakespeare*. 1991. New York: Oxford University Press. P.4. For the version used in this thesis throughout, cf. “Works Cited.”

What the Christian parody and the original have in common, though, is the theme of incarnation; Miss Brodie is not just a teacher in the abstract sense of someone mediating an intellectual or spiritual message. On the contrary, she, like Christ according to the Gospels, acts out her ideas and embodies her message in the flesh and blood medium that is herself. Or at least, she tries to. And therein lies the major difference between Miss Brodie and Christ, namely, that her words fail in the end to give life to herself or her devotees. It is her life-giving pretence, her exaltation of herself above her fellow beings, that, together with her cruelty towards her designated scapegoat Mary, marks her as Satanic.

What Massie says about Miss Brodie is true also of another teacher figure, namely Julian Morrow in *The Secret History*. Indeed, the epigraph to Book II of Tarrt's novel echoes the dangers of extreme subjectivity Massie sees Spark warning against through her antiheroine. The epigraph is from E.R.Dodds's *The Greeks and the Irrational* (1951), and it deals with the nature of Dionysus: "Dionysus [is] the Master of Illusions, who could make a vine grow out of a ship's plank, and in general enable his votaries to see the world as the world's not" (Dodds / cit. *SH*, 307). Tarrt has turned Dodd's past tense "was" to the present tense "is" (cf. Dodds 2012, 77), perhaps to stress the Nietzschean concept of Dionysus as an impersonal power that can be invoked and embodied at any moment (cf. Nietzsche 2007, 81), instead of as a specific deity formerly worshipped by an ancient cult.<sup>93</sup> Like the supposedly prescient Miss Brodie, Julian also feels he can predict how his students turn out, although for him, the forecast derives from Greek fatalism rather than Calvinist doctrine ("It seems to me that psychology is only another word for what the ancients called fate."; *SH*, 30).

The teacher figures of *The Secret History* and *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* demonstrate the inherent falseness of their prophecies by, among other things, advocating aestheticism in place of moralism. As Frank Kermode claims in his reading of Spark's novel, "it might be said that Brodie's interests are on the whole aesthetic, whereas God's are spiritual" (Kermode 2004, xiv); Kermode's findings on aesthetic propriety overriding religious propriety are echoed by Patricia Waugh (2010, 86), although she equates the latter with Edinburgh Calvinism which for Spark's implied author represents a deviated rather than authentic transcendence.

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<sup>93</sup> The original sentence by Dodds is as follows: "For Dionysus was the Master of Magical Illusions, who could make a vine grow out of a ship's plank, and in general enable his votaries to see the world as the world's not" (Dodds 2012, 77). Besides changing the past tense into a present one, Tarrt has also altered the sentence by leaving out the word "Magical" from "the Master of Magical Illusions." This omission may have been meant to serve the same purpose as the changing of the tense, namely to stress the contemporary and continuing significance of Dionysus's appeal, "magical" being too quaint and fairy-tale like a description.

In *The Secret History*, Julian is similarly prone to adopt an aesthetic viewpoint even on an immediately disturbing issue like Bunny's disappearance. Richard notes that even while worried about his student's fate, Julian cannot help appreciating "all that grand cinematic expanse of men and wilderness and snow that lay beneath us" and "that there was something about the operatic sweep of the search which could not fail to appeal to him and that he was pleased, however obscurely, with the aesthetics of the thing" (*SH*, 382). Always the teacher's pet, Henry more readily than Richard manages to anticipate and articulate Julian's epic engrossment:

'Like something from Tolstoy, isn't it?' he remarked.

Julian looked at over his shoulder, and I was startled to see that there was real delight on his face.

'Yes,' he said. 'Isn't it, though?' (*SH*, 382; italics in the original)

"The universe of the possessed is the reverse image of the Christian universe. The positive mediation of the saint is replaced by the negative mediation of anguish and hate," Girard writes in his analysis of Dostoevsky's *The Possessed* (Girard 1976, 60). The motif of possession and its relationship to 'interdividual psychology' is even more explicit in Tarrt's *The Secret History* that appears to be inspired by this and other Dostoevsky novels.

According to John Gardner, when morality itself is in doubt, "[i]t becomes possible for a man as intelligent as Norman Mailer to speak of the murderer Charles Manson as 'intellectually courageous', for the brave pursuit of truth changes utterly when truth becomes whim" (Gardner 1978, 76-77). By citing Manson as an example of moral transgression (and Mailer as the murderer's mimetically infatuated observer), Gardner thus encapsulates the Nietzsche embraced by the poststructuralists: a Superman who not only rises above the moral categories of good and evil, but one who transgresses meaning itself in the intellectual realm. This kind of ethical and logical levelling is also what takes place in the hearts and minds of the Greek students of *The Secret History* – though, ironically enough, they scoff at the mindless undifferentiation of their more democratic and less aristocratic peers who are levellers in their own right, but who still, through their very egalitarianism, retain the categorical sanctity of life, if only by passively refraining from the act of murder.

In his book, *On Moral Fiction* (1978), Gardner deals with the loss of transcendent morality, even though for him there is no Christian preference, and, unlike Girard, an authentically vertical transcendence for him includes pagan deities like the Olympian pantheon of Homer's epics. Still, Gardner comes close to Girard's novelistic truth when he

writes of the lost ideal of morally sound art: “[...] from God comes the standard; it is enacted by a hero and recorded by the poet” (Gardner 1978, 28).

As was already noted in chapter four, *The Secret History*, although concerned with religion in its archaic and ritualistic dimensions, is a novel deeply rooted in secular history. However, precisely because the characters can no longer believe in religion (Judeo-Christian or archaic) as a social psychological authority, they are over-compensating this loss in a nostalgic ‘return’ to the consoling bosom of primordial paganism. Henry’s ecstatic embrace of Dionysianism in Tartt’s novel is not all that different from Sandy’s more discriminating reflections on Calvinism (and her seemingly more authentic leaning towards Catholicism which, although in principle favoured by Spark herself, still has a lot of aesthetic posturing in it). For Sandy, the Calvinist Church is like the collective embodiment of Miss Brodie, and as such, “something definite to reject” (*PMJB*, 108).<sup>94</sup> Henry, on the other hand, finds in the Dionysiac cult the Nietzschean antidote to the Socratic dualism of the rational ego (*SH*, 186-187). All the same, both characters are either rejecting or embracing a system of thought or a set of behaviours that is inherently alien to their quotidian existence. With their fondness for external trappings of religion they are clinging to that part of religion that has ceased to have relevance for the contemporary secular subject. Just like those Proustian snobs who fawn over aristocratic titles that have no concrete value save their purely metaphysical prestige, Sandy and Henry are attaching importance to impotence simply in order to differentiate themselves from the others they look down on and to identify with the Others they look up to. As Girard points out in *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, snobbism can only exist in a society that has lost its aristocratic differentiations, since only then do they have to be over-compensated for. Metaphysical desire always needs some deity to worship, as is demonstrated by the nihilists of Dostoevsky’s *The Possessed* (Girard 1976, 158).

A somewhat looser discipleship motif can be detected in *What I Loved*, which substitutes artists for the pedagogues of *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* and *The Secret History*. The theme of influence is nevertheless important in Hustvedt, as well, though less explicit than in Spark or Tartt. The school environment is here replaced by the home environment, and *What I*

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<sup>94</sup> The efficacy of rejected authority is something Sandy attaches both to Calvinism especially and to teen age influences in general. When interviewed in the convent by her fan, the one who prompts Sandy – and the narrator – to utter the novel’s closing line, Sandy agrees with her interviewer that “[t]he influences of one’s teens are very important” (*PMJB*, 34), but adds that they can also “provide something to react against” (*PMJB*, 35). It is obvious that by “they” Sandy really means Miss Brodie, because the dialogue with the interviewer at this early point in the narrative discourse contains the first version of her acknowledgement of the dead teacher’s influence (“‘Oh no,’ said Sandy. ‘But there was a Miss Jean Brodie in her prime.’”; *ibid.*) that, in a slightly differently worded sentence, draws the story to a close (“Sandy said: ‘There was a Miss Jean Brodie in her prime.’”; *PMJB*, 128).

*Loved* is much concerned with the psychology of the family structure. Though less Dostoevskyan plot-wise than *The Secret History*, *What I Loved* bears a certain resemblance to *The Possessed*, a work that revolves around the crisis of parenthood, both on an individual and a societal level.

Hustvedt's novel, like Dostoevsky's, employs the motif of the monstrous child who incarnates the unsavoury characteristics that have remained dormant in the parent. The child thus holds a kind of magnifying glass in front of the parent. Girard has also paid attention to this generational mimesis in Dostoevsky's *The Possessed* that turns the parents and their offspring into fearfully symmetrical doubles:

The transition from one generation to another makes clear the dynamism of the underground. [...]. Each generation embodies one stage of ontological sickness. The truth about the parents remains hidden for a long time but it breaks out with incredible force in the feverish agitation, the violence, and the debauchery of the children. The parents are amazed to discover that they have brought forth monsters; in their children they see the opposite of themselves. They do not see the connection between the tree and its fruit. (Girard 1976, 253-254)

This genetic aspect of contagion (which, of course, is not really genetic at all in the biological sense) further illuminates the pervasiveness of mimetic conflict in human relationships. Furthermore, in the Dostoevskyan context, it adds to the motif of possession that the title alludes to. *What I Loved* shares the motifs of possession and doubling with *The Possessed*, and it has already been pointed out in chapter four that the character of Mark Wechsler is both carved empty by his diabolical mentor and surrogate father, Teddy Giles, and filled by his essence – an essence that is really a kind of emptiness. What should still be elaborated on, is the paternal-filial dynamic of Bill and Mark (and, by implication, of Leo and Matthew), and it is related to a larger theme of master-disciple interaction, especially the question of influence.

In *What I Loved*, the question of influence is linked with the question of paternity – not so much biological, as spiritual or philosophical paternity. Firstly, there is the parallel between Bill's fathering of Mark and Leo's fathering of Matthew. Secondly, there is the ominous surrogate fathering of Mark by Teddy Giles. But the paternal metaphor is not as clear-cut as that, since there are hidden similarities between Giles and Bill, and even Giles and Leo. If Giles is a surrogate father to Mark, then so is Leo, who in a way inherits Mark from the deceased Bill. Even before Bill's death Leo has gladly, and in view of future trouble, unsuspectingly, established a special bond between Mark who was the best friend and closest peer of his dead son Matthew. Introducing Mark into his solitary household (after his wife

Erica has abandoned him) serves for Leo a therapeutic purpose. In a more sinister way, Mark's inhabiting Matthew's room sets him up as a double for Leo's 'real' son, and, conversely, Leo as the double for Mark's 'real' father, Bill.

As if this doubling were not eerie enough, there is also a doubling of Bill and Matthew, both of whom die suddenly and tragically, and who in life shared similar creative tendencies (Bill apprenticed Matthew in drawing and painting, whereas Mark did not show much interest in artistic activity), and, more specifically, a fondness for baseball.

Although the affinity between Bill and Matthew is wholly benign in itself, after their death, the special relationship between his best friend and only child haunts Leo and at times stirs up in him a decidedly resentful anxiety over the real fatherhood of Matthew, for example in a dream Leo has of Bill returning from the dead and claiming that Matthew is his son and Mark is Leo's ("[...] I was furious and woke up tormented by the misunderstanding.; *WIL*, 258).

Leo's dream allows him the antagonism towards Bill that has lain dormant during his conscious hours. Also, it is telling that Leo should make such an immediate association between the two sons, expressly substituting Matthew for Mark in order to drive home to Bill the factual paternal status of both men. Leo also has a self-serving agenda behind his assertions, as the dream takes place after the less savoury aspects in Mark's character have begun to surface. Thus, Leo's claiming Matthew as his son while allocating Mark to Bill is motivated not just by love, but also parental pride; Leo's son may be dead, but he is nevertheless the superior of the two sons. In his momentary rivalry with Bill, Leo has done his best to take possession of the object of mimetic desire.

Bearing in mind these reshufflings of parenthood between the two main characters, it is not surprising, that Teddy Giles, a Charles Mansonesque caricature of fatherhood, not only haunts Bill, but Leo as well. To both Leo's and Bill's chagrin, Mark, like so many other teenagers of the time period, responds to Giles's nihilistic world view. Mark's willingness to become a pawn in a game played by Giles is yet another symptom of the postmodern crisis of the subject, and it is juxtaposed with the nineteenth-century hysterical women studied by Violet who is a historian and social critic. These female patients were exploited by male physicians in their medical experiments and made to perform various tricks under hypnosis. In the end the women lost their identity due to the manipulative proximity of their doctors. One such trick – though not literally induced by hypnosis – performed by Mark under Giles's influence is to dress up as a woman and pose as "Mrs Giles" (*WIL*, 313). This drag act does not mean that Mark's true gender identity is female, but rather, that he has no true identity,

regarding gender or anything else for that matter. Mark's disguising himself as a member of the opposite sex is similar to the Dionysiac carnival in Tartt's *The Secret History* that was analyzed in chapter 4.2. Also in Hustvedt's novel, the blurring of the culturally essential distinction of gender takes place in a highly artificial setting, during Giles's self-conscious escape across America with Mark as both his partner in crime and a purported future victim – a ruse to get Leo involved and playing a part in this elaborate performance scripted by Giles for his own amusement. A prolonged carnival, Giles's cat and mouse game with Leo stages the taboos of sex and violence that in routine existence would be repressed (cf. Girard 2005, 134-137). Mark is not so much Giles's disciple, as his marionette – which is actually what mimetic desire in its most intense form transforms subjects into.

In his battle with Giles, Leo asserts his own ideal of paternal influence as a counter-force to Giles's mimetic puppetry. Leo's own agenda is no less imitative, but for him it is a question of distinguishing between right and wrong kinds of imitation. Leo holds Bill's memory up as a benign mirror for Mark, not because Bill is Mark's rightful father in the biological sense, but because his fatherhood is essentially spiritual. During their meeting in the absurdly kitschy Opryland Hotel in Nashville (with interiors consisting of "miniature villages that are meant to resemble New Orleans or Savannah or Charleston"; *WIL*, 316), Leo tries to persuade Mark into abandoning Giles and rekindle a spark of filial solidarity with the deceased Bill. When Mark's unresponsiveness becomes clear, Leo becomes infuriated by what for him constitutes a slur on Bill's moral legacy. Mark's regression into his automaton-like state also drives the point of Giles's Satanic victory home for him. What finally causes Leo to lose his cool, is Mark's belittling Bill's portrait of him as a baby, one notoriously slashed by Giles:

"I don't get why it's such a big deal. Dad made lots of paintings. That was just one—"

"Just imagine how he would have felt," I said.

Mark shook his head. "He wasn't even around."

The word "around" set me off. Looking into Mark's shallow, dead eyes and hearing that moronic euphemism for his father's death made me furious. "That painting was better than you are, Mark. It was more real, more alive, more powerful than you have ever been or will ever be. You are the thing that's ugly, not that painting. You're ugly and empty and cold. Your something your father would hate." I was breathing loudly through my nose. My rage overwhelmed me. I made an effort to gain control of it.

"Uncle Leo," Mark simpered, "that's mean." (*WIL*, 321)

Leo's rage is objective in that he is angered by Mark's behaviour (his "moronic" choice of words) and appearance ("shallow, dead eyes"); it is subjective in that its source is the perceived blemish on Bill's memory (the discrepancy between Bill the father and Mark the son is for Leo particularly offensive). When Leo is tracing the runaway Giles and Mark, he sleepily watches Don Siegel and Daniel Mainwaring's <sup>95</sup>*The Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956) on the hotel television when he gets a telephone call from Giles (*WIL*, 312-313). The parallel is obvious: manipulated by Giles from without, Mark has died from within; like the people whose bodies are taken over by aliens in the 1950's science-fiction film, Mark is now a mere "pod" (*WIL*, 313). But the "pod" metaphor has an equally sinister undercurrent with regard to Leo himself, since it is his identity that is under attack. When Leo starts to feel ill due to the mental and physical strain the bizarre trip has put on him, Giles and Mark offer to escort him to his hotel room. Once there, however, Leo is told that he was taken to Giles's room instead. Giles's slyly aggressive manner of handling the older and more vulnerable man resembles a kind of assault, since Leo is almost kidnapped (he is taken to a strange room without his explicit consent) and physically humiliated in a way that has disturbing overtones of sexual violence:

He leaned over me and whispered, "But Professor, aren't you curious about me?" Then Giles put his fingers on my head. I could feel his hand on my scalp, felt him playing with strands of my hair, and when I looked him in the eyes, he smiled. "Have you ever thought of using a little color?" he said. I tried to shake my head, but he grabbed me on either side of my face, pressing the sides of my glasses into my skin, and then he slammed my head against the wall. I grunted with pain.

"I'm sorry," he said. "Did I hurt you?" (*WIL*, 326)

With Mark looking on, Giles subjects Leo to the kind of violation that recalls the duo's manhandling of Teenie Gold, the girl in Giles's 'family' on whose skin they carved Mark's initials. Again, Giles acts as a master for Mark to emulate and learn from. But whereas Teenie's abuse served as a form of scapegoating (she was, after all, a third party to Giles and Mark's mimetic game), Leo is also Giles's rival; not only is he the more legitimate surrogate father to Mark (and thus, a competitor in pursuit of the same 'object') but also, through his special bond with Bill, the next best thing to Giles's artistic rival and idol who he seeks to usurp symbolically.

Through his assault of Leo, Giles performs a similar act than that of destroying Bill's painting of Mark (an act that is compared to a rape by the press; *WIL*, 300), namely, he is

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<sup>95</sup> The film was directed by Siegel and written by Mainwaring who based it on Jack Finney's 1954 novel of the same name.



transforming Leo into an inert object or prop (the assault takes place in a hotel room that Giles has used as a scene to experiment with yet another art performative, one that includes fake blood and setting a small fire to the premises). The essential difference between Giles's handling of Mark and Leo is, of course, that Mark has been turned into an accomplice (albeit a passive, puppet-like one) in violence, whereas Leo is positioned as a victim – an old man vulnerable to the vandalism of the young. But Giles's strangely seductive language, both in the erotic ("Have you ever thought of using a little color?") and the mimetic sense ("But Professor, aren't you curious about me?") suggests an attempt at persuasion, not mere violation; Giles is applying his powers of mimetic contagion on Leo. Of course, he does not succeed in the long run, and the bizarre assault remains a mere interlude. Leo does not succumb to Giles's artistic violence (namely, by becoming a partner in crime instead of a victim) like Mark has. However, Giles remains for Leo a horrific incarnation of everything that art should not be (i.e., confusion of a person and a thing), and therefore the relationship between Giles and Mark (one that resembles both a master-disciple dynamic as well as a father-son relationship) presents itself to Leo as the reverse image of his and Bill's friendship, which also had the potential of mimetic conflict. Fortunately, however, this potential is never realized.

It is precisely this unrealized potential of mimetic conflict spiralling out of control that marks Leo and Bill as a double pair in relation to the pair of Giles and Mark, a pair that realizes their mimetic potential in their *folie à deux*. If art can be considered a message that contains a certain ideology, then Giles and Bill can be said to manifest a strikingly different message through both their artworks and their personal behaviour. By the same token, their influence inspires different kinds of behaviour in their 'disciples,' Mark and Leo, respectively.

The motif of discipleship, the idea of a personality carrying benign or malign qualities that are transmissible onto others who nevertheless remain themselves (as opposed to being possessed by the other's influence) is also evident in the relationship between Mark and Matthew. After Matthew's death, Bill expresses to Leo his desire to have his son benefit from his friendship with the son of his best friend. Furthermore, it is interesting that the discussion concerning the two men's sons takes place after Leo has experienced a shock of recognition through an artwork by Bill that he interprets as depicting Matt's drowning; it is this message that is transmitted from the artist to the art viewer, and thus signals a moment of objective cognition (as opposed to subjective affect), and is therefore non-mimetic by nature. Because

Bill also confesses his paternal envy for Leo, the discussion is also an instance of explicitly overcoming mimetic desire (in the negative, resentful sense) by seeking to articulate it:

[...] “I loved Matthew, you know.” He spoke very quietly. “That year before he died, I understood what he was and what was in him.” Bill moved his hand to the pane.

I rose from the chair and walked toward him.

“I envied you,” he said. “I wished...” He paused and breathed through his nose. “I still wish Mark were more like him, and I feel bad for wishing it. Matt was open to everything. He didn’t always agree with me.” Bill smiled at the memory. “He argued with me. I wish Mark...” (*WIL*, 187)

The interaction between Bill and Leo in Bill’s studio is the polar opposite of Leo’s meeting with Giles in the latter’s hotel room. There is a symmetry of places (Bill and Leo talk in a studio, which is precisely the ad hoc function Giles uses the hotel room for), as well as gestures (Bill’s affectionate touching of Leo’s shoulders earlier during their talk stands in stark contrast to Giles’s sudden and disturbingly intimate stroking of Leo’s hair and glasses and the subsequent bumping of his head against a wall). Also, Mark is the source of anguish in both scenes, as is the question of father-son relationships in general. Mark is physically present in the scene with Giles (Mark’s surrogate father), but only alluded to in the scene with Bill; in the scene with Giles, Bill (Mark’s real father), now dead, is not physically present, but his memory is very much so. The fact that Leo manages to disentangle himself from the mimeticism of Giles and Mark in the hotel scene is due to his non-mimetic adherence to Bill’s personal legacy; although not completely free of mimetic desire towards Bill (whose ghost appears to Leo in a dream and insists that he is the true father of Matthew), Leo summons the necessary solidarity to Bill in defending his son from a mimetic threat posed by Giles. Whereas Giles has subjective reasons for claiming Mark, Leo’s motives are selfless in that he is trying to save Mark for what he deems an objective danger to the boy.

Although Bill feels guilty for wishing Mark was more like Matthew, his desire is actually quite benign; he does not wish that Mark were Matthew, but, rather, that he were *like* Matthew. He is actually articulating a kind of *imitatio Christi*, in that what Mark should imitate is not Matthew’s unique being but his preoccupations. For a Christian, to be Christ-like is not to take possession of Christ, but to imitate his mode of existence and the objectives of his desire.<sup>96</sup> The fact that Bill and Matthew share the gift of artistic talent serves not to mark them as exceptional and ingenious personas in the Romantic vein, but, quite on the

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<sup>96</sup> “What Jesus invites us to imitate is his own *desire*, the spirit that directs him toward the goal on which his intention is fixed: to resemble God the Father as much as possible” (Girard 2001, 13; italics in the original).

contrary, to demonstrate their objectivity, the separateness of their ideas and convictions from their being.

The contrast between unique being and shared beliefs has been insightfully analyzed by Walter Benn Michaels in his 2004 book *The Shape of the Signifier* that is also a bitter indictment on identity politics that has characterized the emancipatory trends in literary criticism and cultural studies since the late 1960's, but which, according to Michaels, actually hampers egalitarianism instead of enhancing it. This is because the poststructuralist preoccupation with the materiality of the signifier, according to which "the question of what's in the work of art (a question about the object) is replaced by the question of what the reader sees (a question about the subject)" (Michaels 2004, 6), effectively puts a stop to intersubjectivity and sequesters people into a hermetically sealed uniqueness:

[...] once what people believe is replaced (as Fukuyama says) by what they want or (as de Man says) by what they see, the difference between them requires no disagreement. The difference between what you want and what I want is just a difference between you and me; the difference between what you see and what I see is just the difference between where you're standing and where I'm standing—literally, a difference in subject position. (Michaels 2004, 10)

As he does in a later book, *The Trouble with Diversity* (2007 [2006]), Michaels here argues that replacing ideology with identity (i.e., the "transformation of subjectivity into subject position"; Michaels 2004, 149) leads to a moral relativism in which it is perspective, not conviction, that matters. Regarding *What I Loved*, Michaels's polemic has an interesting echo in the character of Mark who completely lacks opinions and beliefs, but who is rather consumed by other people's perspective of him, becoming everything for everybody. Mark is thus a grotesque parody of the culturally correct form of identity politics where women are women and blacks are blacks and gays are gays, in other words, where identity always has (or is supposed to have) a collective as well as an individual dimension.

Moreover, it is interesting from the point of view of Michaels's argument that what Bill values in Matthew is the latter's ability to disagree with his mentor. Not only is Mark completely incapable of disagreeing with Giles (or, for that matter, with Leo), he becomes possessed by his influences. This protean quality is never more striking than in the double role of "M&M" that Mark has assumed under Giles's supervision; Mark's allowing himself to be possessed by Matthew's ghost instead of merely being inspired by his legacy (as Leo is

inspired by Bill's legacy) is a travesty of the kind of influence Bill has in mind when he wishes his son to be more like his childhood friend.

The kind of perspectivism that Michaels criticizes plays a role in Hustvedt's novel as well, and it is very much personified by the character of Giles. However, Giles is not singular in his ethical and aesthetic relativism, but is merely saturated by the prevailing Zeitgeist.

"Perspective" is indeed a keyword in a conversation Leo engages in on the subject of what counts as true art:

I turned to look at Lola's face, with its perfectly plucked eyebrows, little nose, and gleaming mouth. "If I picked you up and put you in a gallery, you'd be art," I said to her. "Better art than a lot I've seen. Prescriptive definitions don't apply anymore."

Lola moved her shoulders. "You're saying that anything's art if people say it is? Even me?"

"Exactly. It's perspective—not content." (*WIL*, 199-200)

The relativism that has taken over the art community is strongly connected to violence that has simultaneously become more visceral and performative (as opposed to representational) in the artworks generated by that community (before being given a lesson in perspectivism by Leo, the girl named Lola has just lamented the sickness of performatives that include the shooting of a puppy and hammering nails into one's penis; *WIL*, 199). The connection between violence and the undifferentiation of social phenomena has already been commented on in chapter four. What is pertinent to this chapter's discussion is how medium and message – or rather, personality and message – have melted together in the internalization of mimetic desire, a process that causes the subject (the disciple) to lose sight over objective goals and focus instead on the singularity of the charismatic Other (the master).

The levelling of the hierarchical master-disciple dynamic and its more or less fast slide into a symmetrical mirror image relationship is inscribed into the very tradition of education, apprenticeship and mentoring, and lurks as a constant danger in the pedagogical context (whether that context be a classroom setting as in Tartt's *The Secret History* and Spark's *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, or a less structured and extra-curricular one as in Hustvedt's *What I Loved* in which the education is closely related to upbringing and familial nurturing, as well as surrogates thereof). In Hustvedt's novel, the relationship between Giles and his adopted disciple, Mark, has the added ambivalence of sexual overtones – something that is less obvious, though speculated on by the main characters in Spark and Tartt (these speculators, Richard and Sandy, respectively, are not necessarily reliable, as their speculations derive from their own sense of exclusion from the supposedly sexual realm, and are thus more mimetic

than erotic<sup>97</sup>). By contrast, the explicitly implied though not quite proven sexual dimension gives Giles's interest in Mark a touch of pederasty.

The pederastic combination of sex and mentoring confounds the hierarchical interaction between teacher and student even further. Jane Gallop, in her 1988 article, "The Student Body," however, maintains that the hierarchy still remains, even when education becomes sexual. This is because the age difference between the lovers preserves the hierarchy that is blurred by the homosexual sameness of their sex:

Pederasty is undoubtedly a useful paradigm for classic European pedagogy. A greater man penetrates the lesser man with his knowledge. The student is empty, a receptacle for the phallus; the teacher is the phallic fullness of knowledge. The fact that teacher and student are traditionally of the same sex but of different ages contributes to the interpretation that the student has no otherness, nothing different from the teacher, simply less. (Gallop 1988, 43)

Gallop points out quite aptly the cannibalistic motif of devouring inherent in "classic" pederastic logic which seeks to subjugate the otherness of the junior party in order to integrate it with the more replete being of the senior party. This logic seems to apply in some degree to the Giles-Mark dynamic in *What I Loved*, whereas in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* the hierarchical logic is thwarted by Sandy's active and clever undermining of Miss Brodie's authority. However, Gallop may not see the mimetic apprehension on the teacher's part that causes the overkill on the insistence of the student's nothingness. Certainly, the hierarchy is not always already there, otherwise there would be no point in asserting one's authority so forcefully. In *What I Loved*, Teddy Giles uncannily presents himself as someone whose gender and age are both ambiguous. Not only does he have an artistic alter ego in his "She-Monster" act, also his reported age differs, from younger to older (from twenty-one to twenty-four to twenty-eight). Also, the boy Giles eventually murders, nicknamed "Me" (in another parody of identity politics), looks like he is only eleven, but, according to Mark, is nineteen. Most importantly, it is Mark himself who is grotesquely child-like and grown-up at the same time ("At that moment his head with its infantile features and his long, growing body seemed to be at odds with each other, as if the top of him hadn't caught up with the bottom."; *WIL*, 196).

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<sup>97</sup> Both Richard and Sandy try to second-guess the motives behind their teacher's intense interest in their other students and speculate about its sexual nature (*SH*, 77-78; *PMJB*, 120). All the same, in both Spark and Tartt, it is difficult to see repressed homosexuality as *the* underlying theme of character relationships on the whole, because the question of sexuality is so often overshadowed by another social context (e.g., religion, elitism, violence / betrayal) that includes sexuality but is not tantamount to it.

*What I Loved* is a novel deeply concerned with the theme of childhood, and more importantly still, with childhood lost. Of the two main child characters, Matthew dies and Mark loses his soul; thus, it could be said, that while Matthew is an innocent martyr, Mark's innocence is taken away from him through a Mephistophelean seduction of which he is partly responsible. Through undue influence, Giles, reminiscent of the Pied Piper of Hamelin, leads his band of mesmerized children, with Mark among them, into ruin.

Giles is a murderer of children in the physical sense (it is perhaps not a coincidence that his name recalls the legendary medieval serial killer and pedophile, Gilles de Rais<sup>98</sup>), but also in the spiritual. His very method of corruption of the innocent is to blur the boundaries between adulthood and childhood, by parodying the concept of childhood. This parody is achieved in cruel ways, with his young protégées themselves playing out a mock child-likeness (although, as teenagers, they are partly children still). The character "Me" does not only look like a child, he also sports Lego blocks as a sort of prop, while the carcasses of the cats Giles and his gang have butchered as a form of performative art have been dressed in "diapers, baby outfits, pajamas, or training bras" (*WIL*, 209). If Teddy Giles is a Messiah figure, he also uses his disciples as sacrificial lambs in his own place. Mark is "Me's" diametrical opposite (and symmetrical double), in the sense that "Me" takes Mark's place as a victim of real murder, whereas Mark only has to play the part of the art victim, through the destruction of his portrait. Furthermore, Mark is raised to the level of a junior partner in crime, and, although he plays no active role in the killing of "Me," he is strangely unaffected by the boy's fate. His moral and emotional vacuity is a further indication of his difference from Matthew, who Leo remembers as having been almost hysterically empathetic and prone to guilt and self-punishment (*WIL*, 106).

If Giles's artwork is devoted to demeaning children, exuding a deeply felt contempt (befitting Gallop's description of a pederastic educator) for their bodies and minds alike, then Bill's oeuvre by contrast invites children to share in his own creative impulses and enter the fairy-tale worlds he has projected unto his installations (one of which a little girl is reluctant to leave, as her mother has to drag her away to let other spectators view the work; *WIL*, 221-222). It is noteworthy, of course, that Bill considered Matthew his disciple in painting and drawing even though the latter never lived into adulthood. The loving mentorship of Bill with regard to Matthew is thus sharply contrasted with Giles's abusive manipulation of Mark.

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<sup>98</sup> Interestingly enough, Alan Massie compares the eponymous teacher of Spark's *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* with Gilles de Rais, even though she is not a murderer in the literal sense as is the character of Giles in Hustvedt's *What I Loved*. However, according to Massie, Miss Brodie is "prepared to destroy innocence to flesh out her fantasy world" (Massie 1984, 102).

Having recognized the connotations of pederasty in Giles's patronizing of Mark, I would maintain that the sexual motif is not the main issue in the two characters' interaction, but its corruptive qualities are more generalized, socially, psychologically and morally speaking. Giles's mentoring of Mark is a kind of *imitatio Christi* in reverse – an *imitatio Satanae*.

In Tartt's *The Secret History*, the students tease out the fully transgressive and extremely violent implications of their teacher's academic agenda so that the burden of proof rests ultimately on their shoulders with the teacher being guilty of mere hypocrisy.<sup>99</sup> In Spark's *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, the teacher is more actively guilty of her student's (Joyce Emily's) death, having explicitly encouraged her to volunteer in armed warfare. However, Hustvedt's *What I Loved* displays even more sinister involvement of the 'teacher' with the lives – and deaths – of his 'students.' Whereas Miss Brodie's powers of possession are remarkable in that she embodies the mimetic double bind, Giles's corruption of the young seems almost supernaturally corrosive; his possession of his adherents manages to rob the latter of their being and turn them into puppets mechanically acting out his own mimetic desire. Unlike Sandy Stranger, Mark Wechsler is not scheming Giles's downfall, and unlike Henry Winter, he is not plunged into depression over the master's double bind. On the contrary, Mark is emptied of rivalry altogether; unlike mimetic rivals, he seems not to care whether his imitation is discovered or not.

Unlike Sandy with respect to Miss Brodie, Mark is not so much mirroring Giles's desire as he is mindlessly re-enacting it, as if he were a somnambulist and Giles his Mesmer-like hypnotizer.<sup>100</sup> This automaton-like acquiescence actually makes Mark less of a rival in the

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<sup>99</sup> A similar analogy between criminal students and their teacher is in play in Hitchcock's 1948 film, *Rope* (with a screenplay by Arthur Laurents), itself an adaptation (by Hume Cronyn) of Patrick Hamilton's 1929 play of the same name (on the connection between *The Secret History* and *Rope*, cf. Hargreaves 2001, 9; 66), with the important exception, that in *Rope* one student unconsciously wants to get caught so as to be admired by the teacher-detective (see also Black 1991, 88)

<sup>100</sup> Jean-Michel Oughourlian presents a following description of the relationship between hypnosis and mimetic desire: "In the process of hypnosis, what [Girard] call[s] the mediator, or the model, is there in front of the subject. And he lets it be known directly what he requires of the subject, what he wishes the subject to do: he presents him with his *desire*—directly, firmly and unambiguously. This peremptory way of revealing desire is what Bernheim calls the model's *suggestion*."

From then on if the subject acts with conformity with this desire, he enters a state of peaceful mimesis—mimesis without any element of rivalry since the model invites the subject to copy the the model's desire, and this desire does not bear upon any object that belongs to the model. It most frequently involves a form of conduct that is banal and natural: sleep" (Oughourlian / cit. Girard 1987, 320; italics in the original).

Although Leo remarks that, after Bill's death, Mark is "always sleeping" (*WIL*, 266), Mark's mimetic position in relation to Giles is not quite as benign as Oughourlian and Bernheim suggest. Mark's mode of being is analogous to that of a hypnotized subject only to a point. Because Giles is also borrowing Mark's desire and at times enables him to put his dormant fantasies in motion (such as in the case of carving his initials into the skin of one of Giles's female acolytes), Mark's docile complicity is hardly an example of "peaceful mimesis." That said, he never asserts himself in a symmetrically 'doubled' manner in relation to Giles who is always allowed to retain the upper hand.

symmetrical sense and more of a disciple in the hierarchical sense. As a passive object of sacrifice in the divorce of his parents, Mark is no match for his puppet master, Giles. Giles's would-be mimetic rivals (such as Leo and the deceased Bill who lives on through his works) exist outside the hierarchical structure he has established between himself and his adopted 'son.' Although Mark has a history of mimetic rivalry between Matthew when the two were children, it seems that he has handed the reigns of this rivalry to Giles who – by employing the 'M&M' analogy stolen from Bill's artwork – uses it for his own purposes.

The Satanic mediator sets himself up as a model and a stumbling block – the biblical *skandalon* – at the same time. Mimetic corruption is especially hurtful when the imitator is young:

“Woe to the one by whom scandal comes!” Jesus reserves his most solemn warning for the adults who seduce children into the infernal prison of scandal. The more the imitation is innocent and trusting, the more the one who imitates is easily scandalized, and the more the seducer is guilty of abusing this innocence. (Girard 2001, 17)

According to Girard, it is no coincidence that Jesus has recourse to particularly strong language (adopting “an uncharacteristically hyperbolic style”; *ibid.*) when warning adults against seducing children away from him. Furthermore, it is acutely poetic that in “The Gospel According to Matthew” he describes as the seducer's proper punishment “to have a great millstone fastened round his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea” (Matt. 18: 5-9 / *cit.* Girard 1987, 417). “The millstone”, elaborates Girard, “which is turned by asses, is a symbol of repetition” (*ibid.*). The adult's crime is to trip the child up in the scandal of hatred and resentment, “[...] imprisoning him forever within the increasingly narrow circle of the model and the mimetic obstacle, the process of mutual destruction [...]” (*ibid.*). In short, the teacher's crime is to mutate the student's potential *imitatio Christi* into an *imitatio Satanae*, Satan being “the very principle of scandal” (Girard 1987, 418). As a ‘prince of this world,’ the teacher trains the student as the future inheritor of immanent transcendence. It is not by chance, that Richard compares Julian to Aristotle – the man of ideas whose philosophical mentoring spawned an ironclad man of action, Alexander the Great: “([...]I wonder what I should be now if Julian had got hold of me when I was eight years old.) I like to think that maybe he – as Aristotle did – would bring up a man who would conquer the world” (*SH*, 627).

From the point of view of mimetic theory, the master's sadistic control over the masochistic disciple would be a strategy through which to ward off the teacher's own anxiety



arising from the double bind. If this strategy fails and symmetry takes over, it is the sameness of the disciple, and not otherness, that is doubled and only then becomes otherness – but an otherness that is separate from and equal to the teacher’s self; it is something he can neither penetrate nor subjugate, but must rather fight as a mirror image.

No matter then how domineering or fetishistic the mentoring can become, it is not the sexual ‘deviance’ (pedophilia, sadomasochism, etc.) in teacher-student interactions that is necessarily the core issue, the tendency that is repressed, denied or camouflaged. Rather, the deviance is but one dimension of mimetic desire – itself something that must remain hidden.<sup>101</sup>

### 5.3 Satanic Influence

Toni Morrison’s *Sula* is also very much concerned with the motif of adults corrupting the young through example. Of the novels covered so far from this particular viewpoint, it bears a closer resemblance to Hustvedt’s *What I Loved* than Spark’s *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* or Tartt’s *The Secret History*, in that family dynamic takes precedence over the classroom dynamic. The most important of the corruptors is the highly ambiguous character of Eva Peace whose partly Satanic influence on Sula and the community at large has been studied in chapters 2.3. and 4.2., respectively.

Not only does Nel acknowledge in the end of *Sula* that she is as guilty as Sula and that the communal scapegoat could just as easily have been her, but she also awakens from what St. Augustine, another repentant sinner, would call Manichean heresy, a dualist conception of evil as an embodiment of substance rivalling goodness that is posited as an equal, whereas the orthodox Christian view would be to deny Satan a being similar to that of God. As Andrew Delbanco puts it in his evaluation of Augustine’s anti-dualist doctrine of evil, the identification of “the nameable enemy” in another person, real or not, is the self’s most fatal temptation, one that Augustine himself succumbed to in his anti-Semitism, therefore espousing the very same “Manichean heresy” he sought to expose as a hoax (Delbanco 1996, 229).

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<sup>101</sup> To quote Raymund Schwager: “[...] sexuality is not the ultimate *concealed* force, but the ultimate *concealing* force” (Schwager 2000, 28; italics in the original). According to Schwager, Girard’s mimetic theory is a powerful tool in demonstrating “that sexuality is not able to structure either the social order or the religious and cultural world” (Schwager 2000, 27).

The irony in Delbanco's analysis is that the very religion that most vocally opposes dualism simultaneously succumbs to it – and does so by “excoriating” (ibid.) a second religion that is very similar to the first, indeed has given birth to it: Judaism. However, according to Girard, a faithful reading of both the New Testament and the Hebrew Bible would attest that evil, or Satan, is nothing more or less than violence itself; it is both the sacrificial violence that sanctions scapegoating – e.g., the kind of antisemitic scapegoating depicted by Delbanco – and the non-sacrificial violence of mutual rivalry that drives humanity towards the apocalyptic crossroads of either giving into this spirit of destruction or denouncing it in the name of God's love of the victim – *all* victims and not just certain special interest groups. Therefore, the greatest trick performed by Satan is not to convince humanity that he does not exist, but rather, that he does exist<sup>102</sup> – as a person to be victimized in human form by other humans, or as a blood-thirsty God demanding appeasement or retribution through sacrifices.

Applied to *Sula*, the Manichean heresy of seeking to embody Satan in person as delineated by Augustine and the Bible's equating of Satan and violence as conceptualized by Girard<sup>103</sup> are demonstrated in the way the Bottom as a community convinces itself of Sula's inherent evil and continues to socially ostracize and symbolically demonize her in order to pre-empt collective strife from erupting among the majority of its citizens. What Nel realizes in the end of the novel, is the falseness of this projection and her own individual complicity in this collective arrangement. Like Augustine, according to the psychologist Mark Freeman's reading of *Confessions*, she realizes she had until now

[...] engage[d] [...] in a kind of projection process, disavowing [her] own propensity toward evil by considering it as an alien intruder over whom [she] was powerless; [she] divided [herself] into two, me and not-me, in order to cushion the blow of the possibility that [she herself] was a less wonderful [person]. (Freeman 1993, 37)

That Nel has projected her own guilt over Chicken Little's death onto Sula, while also divesting her of undiluted evil for her affair with Jude (whose guilt she apparently deems negligible) is made concrete by the recurring image she invokes upon discovering the affair,

<sup>102</sup> Girard reproaches the demythologizing, or Bultmannian, theology for altogether excluding Satan from its domain (Girard 2001, 32). For Girard Satan is both real and illusionary, that is, his reality is the illusion that a human being could be essentially Satanic, namely deserving of expulsion or murder. Paradoxically, like the Gospels attest, Satan can cast out himself (e.g., Mark 3: 23-26 / cit. Girard 2001, 34; see also Girard 2001; 34-35)

<sup>103</sup> In his theologico-anthropological essay, “Science Meets Violence: An Anthropological Comparison of the Thought of Michael Polanyi and René Girard” (2012), Bruce Hamill draws a parallel between Girard and Augustine, pointing out their agreement over evil's inherent lack of substance (Hamill 2012, 152). Girard's debt to Augustine has also been noted by Astell & Jackson (2014, 138).

of a “gray ball,” an uncannily real object with an apparently subjective agency that is simultaneously real and illusionary. This uncanny thing appears to her at a moment when she is trying to appropriate and inhabit a sense of martyrdom that would attribute guilt to an external party while at the same time purging her from all responsibility:

Hunched down in the small bright room Nel waited. Waited for the oldest cry. A scream not for others, not in sympathy for a burnt child, or a dead father, but a deeply personal cry for one’s own pain. A loud, strident: “Why me?” She waited. The mud shifted, the leaves stirred, the smell of overripe green things enveloped her and announced the beginnings of her very own howl.

But it did not come.

The odor evaporated; the leaves were still, the mud settled. And finally there was nothing, just a flake of something dry and nasty in her throat. She stood up frightened. There was something just to the right of her, in the air, just out of view. She could not see it, but she knew exactly what it looked like. A gray ball hovering just there. Just there. To the right. Quiet, gray, dirty. A ball of muddy strings, but without weight, fluffy but terrible in its malevolence. (*S*, 108-109)

The phantasmagorical “gray ball” that Nel does not see but knows is there, an object that is odourless and weightless but nevertheless concrete in its gray color and dirty, muddy texture combines characteristics of both materiality and immateriality, reality and illusion. The thing that is not really an object or a subject, the gray ball calls to mind Kristeva’s concept of the ‘abject,’ an ambiguous something that escapes meaning but as such also paradoxically strengthens the barriers of meaning (cf. Kristeva 1982, 3). However, in view of what we have just observed about Augustine’s idea of evil and Girard’s analysis of Satan, it could be suggested that Nel’s gray ball is a transference of evil which takes the form of “Satan’s casting out Satan,” namely Nel’s projection of her own hatred on Sula whose inherent evil is subsequently confirmed by the collective status quo of Bottom’s society. In a truly Manichean fashion, good and evil are turned into equal, symmetrical substances, each emptied of the other and undiluted in its essence. But, as Girard vocally and quite controversially claims, this kind of dualism is not true to the anthropological insights at the core of Christianity, despite the fact that its greatest theologians, Augustine among them, have succumbed to the very mechanism they were the first to recognize.

In *Sula*, Nel eventually unmasks her dualist heresy, and this recognition is demonstrated by the destruction of the gray ball:

Suddenly Nel stopped. Her eye twitched and burned a little.  
“Sula?” she whispered, gazing at the tops of trees. “Sula?”

Leaves stirred; mud shifted; there was the smell of overripe green things. A soft ball of fur broke and scattered like dandelion spores in the breeze. (S, 174)

It is after this breaking of the “ball of fur” and its attendant realization that it is not her husband but her friend that she has missed all this time, beginning from the first appearance of this same ball (also marked by “leaves” that “stirred,” “mud” that “shifted” and “the smell of overripe green things”) that Nel is able to let out her long-awaited cry. But it is not her cry anymore, but hers *and* Sula’s. Not only has she forgiven Sula for the affair that broke her marriage to Jude, she has also recognized that her history is inseparable from that of her friend. This togetherness is no longer the symbiosis that marks their complicity in Chicken Little’s death, but an interrelationship. There is no more Manichean difference of substances, nor is there a negative sameness in which shared desires are confused. What remains is a shared humanity of two separate but not insular subjects.

The Satanic dimension is treated somewhat differently in *What I Loved* in which the characters imbued with demoniacal attributes are to an extent scapegoated by the implied author. This demonization is even more disturbing when one considers that both villains have their heroic counterparts: Giles is the reverse image of Bill, whereas Violet serves as a kind of Mother Earth alternative to Lucille’s frigid *femme fatale*. In Hustvedt’s novel there are two characters that have a specifically Satanic aura about them: Teddy Giles and Lucille. The two even have similarly Satanic names; Giles has, as was already observed in chapter 3.3., a first name ironically connoting a gift from God, whereas Lucille’s name is not unlike “Lucifer”; she is also very likely the real-life inspiration for Bill’s controversial “Witch” sculpture, a monstrous double of the very idea of motherhood. Giles’s Satanic dimensions are alluded to through his implicit affinity with an ominous hypnotiser figure in an installation by Bill, one that has employed the method of dermagraphism, or skin writing, on a picture of a woman’s body, so that ‘her’ skin has the word “SATAN” printed on it (*WIL*, 71).<sup>104</sup>

An additional Satanic character is the critic Hasseborg, ‘the fortification of hatred,’ who operates on the diabolical method of divide and conquer; that he bears a physical mark of victimage, a pronouncedly red nose resulting from a skin condition, fails to render him a victim of society at large – though it could bring home to the implied reader that this particular Satan has had his fair share of being ‘cast out’ in the past and is out to take his revenge on the world responsible for his social and professional failures. Hasseborg’s acute mimeticism is pointed out by the six-year-old Matthew, echoing the Gospel wisdom – stated

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<sup>104</sup> The implication comes from the implied author, not from Bill’s character, since he does not yet know about Giles.

in *Matthew's* gospel, no less – about “the lips of children and infants” (Matt 21:16) giving praise where praise is due – and, implicitly, perhaps, recognizing the less praise-worthy aspects of everyday-life. After father and son bump into Hasseborg at Bill's exhibition, Matt shares his observations with Leo:

We left Hasseborg with his red nose inside one of Bill's doors.

“That was a funny man,” Matt said to me on the street as he took my hand.

“Yes,” I said. “He's funny, but you know he can't help the way he looks.”

“But he talks funny, too, Dad.” Matt stopped walking and I waited. I could see that he was thinking hard. My son thought with his face in those days. His eyes narrowed. He screwed up his nose and tightened his mouth. After several seconds, he said, “He talks like me when I'm pretending.” Matt deepened his voice, “Like this— *I'm Spiderman.*”

I stared down at Matthew. “Well, you're right, Matt,” I said. “He is pretending.”

“But who is he pretending to be?” Matt asked.

“Himself,” I said.

Matt laughed at this and said, “That's silly,” and then he burst into song. “Ha, Ha,” he sang, “Rumpelstiltskin is my name! Rumpel, Rumpel, Rumpel, Rumpel, Rumpelstiltskin is my name!” (*WIL*, 77; italics in the original)

This father-son dialogue deconstructs Hasseborg into a self that is painfully aware of a lack in his being and who is trying to fill this void with borrowed desire – borrowed from whom exactly the reader does not rightly know, but a moment before Leo has remarked to the narratee, that Hasseborg “had tossed a red scarf around his neck and over one sloping shoulder in the manner of a French student” (*WIL*, 76), and that the “overt touch of vanity” inherent in this garment makes Leo “pity him for a moment” (*ibid.*). More concretely, however, Hasseborg has also just positioned himself against Bill: “Just making the rounds,” he said in a voice that was unnecessarily loud. “I missed the opening, but I certainly heard about it. Made a dull roar among the cognoscenti” (*WIL*, 77). Hasseborg's rehearsed aloofness – and his loudness in articulating it – serves of course as proof of his intense preoccupation with the artist he is too patrician to “roar” about. Matt's identification of Hasseborg with the eponymous antagonist of the Grimm fairy-tale, the malicious artisan-dwarf<sup>105</sup> who tears himself apart in anger over the unmasking of his real name (i.e., identity, or perceived weakness thereof) quite explicitly renders the art critic monstrous. By seeing through Hasseborg's mimetic charade, Matthew proves himself strong enough to resist being corrupted by a Satanic influence. Not so with Mark, who succumbs to the mimetic temptations of Giles, ending up as a cautionary example echoing the Gospel warning against

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<sup>105</sup> One need not be a disability rights activist to appreciate the obvious scapegoating of a figure with a physical anomaly.

adults seducing children into the sins of pride and envy at the risk of meriting the punishments of the proverbial millstone to be placed around their necks. Girard reads the “millstone” metaphor as signifying the repetition involved in mimetic rivalry (Girard 1987, 417).

The corruption of the young by their elders is a powerful motif in all of the novels analyzed, with the notable exception of McEwan’s *Amsterdam*, which lacks a decidedly *senior* Satanic character, like Miss Brodie (or Miss Mackay) of *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, Eva Peace in *Sula*, Julian Morrow in *The Secret History*, or Teddy Giles (or Lucille) in *What I Loved*. The main characters of this novel are all decidedly ‘grown-up,’ and therefore their interactions are more symmetrical than hierarchical; of all the novels covered in this study, *Amsterdam* is most strikingly a narrative about rivalry.

*Amsterdam* does, however, have a character whose function is to play the role of the corrupting *master*. This character is George Lane. By the end of the novel, George is left metaphorically dancing on Vernon and Clive’s graves. He has sparked off the rivalry between Clive and Vernon by producing the compromising photographs of Garmony, another rival for the affections of his deceased wife, and is thus the puppet master pulling the strings of the entire mimetic drama of McEwan’s novel. As the narrative draws to a close, all three of George’s main rivals in love have been either eliminated or emasculated:

[...] Garmony beaten down, and trussed up nicely by his lying wife’s denials of his affair at her press conference, and now Vernon out of the way, *and* Clive. All in all, things hadn’t turned out so badly on the former lovers front. This surely would be a good time to start thinking about a memorial service for Molly. [...]. [...] and he alone would make the speech, and no one else. No former lovers exchanging glances. (*A*, 178; italics in the original)

The battlefield imagery (“the former lovers *front*”) is far from superfluous, for George is the strategic genius behind the ‘war’ central to the plot, even though Vernon and Clive are hardly blameless. George emerges as the winner of the object of this rivalry, namely the hold on Molly’s memory.

George Lane is then the most ‘Satanic’ character in *Amsterdam*. In his book *I See Satan Fall like Lightning*, Girard equates the Judeo-Christian concept of Satan with mimetic rivalry and sacrificial violence; for him, Satan actually *is* the spirit of violence and the instigator of scapegoating. Girard also evokes the etymologies of both Satan and the Holy Ghost and reminds the reader that the former is the synonym of the prosecutor, while the latter is synonymous with the defense attorney (Girard 2001, 189-190). Bearing in mind these courtroom analogies, it is interesting that in *Amsterdam*, the newspaper edited by Vernon (and

partly owned by George) is called *The Judge*. The atmosphere of the newsroom is also very Satanic, resulting in Vernon becoming a victim of a kind of regicide as he is eventually fired because of his treatment of the Garmony photographs scoop.

According to Girard, Satan is not so much a subject or character as he is a spirit or contagion of violence between individuals. But as a master of (sacrificial) ceremonies, a stage manager of the tragedy, George Lane seems also to embody the mimetic principle. It is he who, without actually getting his hands dirty, has placed obstacles on his rivals' paths. Girard recalls the Biblical meaning of the word "scandal," which in the original Greek means "stumbling block" – and is often linked with Satan ("the living obstacle that trips men up"; Girard 1987, 162). George Lane quite literally *scandalizes* his enemies. The character is truly 'a prince of this world.'

## 6 “As he grows greater, I must grow less.”: Love-Hate Relationship in Narrative Memory and Identity

In his 1994 article, “The ‘remembered’ self,” the psychologist Jerome Bruner, one of the founders of a discipline called ‘narrative psychology,’ asserts, that “[s]elf [...] is [...] a complex mental edifice that one constructs by the use of a variety of mental processes, one of which must surely be remembering” (Bruner 1994, 41). And if memory is “the present of the past” (Hausheer 1976, 32), it must also include the present of the self’s past relationships with others. And if these others are at the present time dead, then, by implication they still live in the mind of the self.

The other as remembered by the self is a recurring subject matter in narrative fiction, and yet it has not been theorized as often or as systematically as it undoubtedly deserves, something already lamented in chapter two. Girard’s mimetic theory addresses the fundamental importance of interpersonal relationships both inside and outside literary fiction, but as already noted, he is not always the best theorist to answer questions concerning the very narrativity involved in the narrating of the interaction between selves and others. Therefore, despite the fact that he does treat the changes undergone by characters in their mimetic desire towards the other character’s being, he does not ground his insights in literary contexts that are especially pregnant with the motif of memory, such as the elegiac genre. One need not be a genre theorist to appreciate the benefits this context would bring to both mimetic theory and narrative poetics. Furthermore, one need definitely not clip Girard’s theoretical wings or tone down his bold anthropological generalizations in order to appreciate their potentially efficacious juxtaposition with more specialized branches of literary studies. Quite to the contrary: these branches may serve as convenient attachments to the great trunk of mimetic theory.<sup>106</sup>

One literary theorist who has analyzed character relationships with regard to the dimension of memory, is Kenneth A. Bruffee, the coiner of the genre term ‘elegiac romance.’ For Bruffee, the elegiac romance, whether a novel, a novella or a short-story, establishes a tension between two characters, one of whom is the first-person narrator of the story.<sup>107</sup> The

<sup>106</sup> One could, of course, reverse this hierarchy and claim instead that mimetic theory would make a convenient aid to the greater field of narrative studies.

<sup>107</sup> Bruffee’s elegiac romance structure is committed to the observing or eulogizing character’s being the narrator. However, it would appear completely feasible, at least in certain contexts such as mine, to include *focalizing* characters in addition to *narrating* ones in the character position in which the self’s relationship with a heroic Other is a presence providing occasion for the narrative process the purpose of which is to solve the problems inherent in the interaction between the main character (either a first-person narrator of the story or the reminiscing focalizer of that story) and the heroic second character.



narrator's story begins as a sort of biography of the other character, whom the narrator looks up to as a heroic figure. Towards the end, however, the narrative starts to resemble an autobiography of the narrator himself. The process of narration in an elegiac romance narrative is tantamount to a kind of exorcism, whereby the narrator expulses the lingering menace that is the overbearing influence of his heroic Other:

The problem the narrator faces is that although his hero is now dead or irretrievably lost, his hero's influence remains unaccountably alive in the narrator's mind. The narrator attempts to solve this problem by coming to terms, through telling the tale, with the debilitating influence that his hero continues to exert over him. (Bruffee 1983, 28)

According to Bruffee, an elegiac romance is a romance because it involves a heroic figure embarked on a quest, and it is an elegy because its narrator tells the story after the heroic figure is dead (Bruffee 1971, 465). He compares elegiac romances with pastoral elegies, but stresses that the latter ones treat the heroic figure in a more vague and archetypal manner; nevertheless, both genres share an essential feature, namely the psychological rejuvenation or catharsis of the narrator figure coming to terms with the loss of his hero (Bruffee 1983, 44).

For Bruffee, whose theories are not inspired by Christianity like Girard's, what is at stake is not the integrity of the immortal soul of the narrator, but more prosaically, his mental health, as he is "struggling to become his own person" instead of remaining "the appendage of another person's being" (Bruffee 1983, 56-57). Similarly, for Girard, the 'great' novels by the likes of Cervantes, Stendhal, Flaubert, Dostoevsky and Proust consist of plots that deliver the main character from a love-hate relationship with the supposedly superior Other, leading to both spiritual independence and a sense of belonging (Girard 1976, 298). Bruffee's exemplary texts are more contemporary and they include, among others, Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, Mann's *Doctor Faustus* and Warren's *All the King's Men*. But although the conversion motif remains elusive in Bruffee's more psychological (and less religious) approach, he is even more explicit about the role time plays in the transformation experience of the character's development. In the elegiac romance, memory of things past is essential:

The *necessary conditions* for elegiac romance fiction are the narrator's protracted hero worship of his friend, and his friend's death before the narrator begins to tell the tale. The *occasion* of the narrator's tale is his irretrievable loss of his hero. The *ostensible purpose* of his tale is to memorialize his lost hero. The *real purpose* of his tale is to recover the coherence of his own interior world, lost when he lost the screen, so to speak, upon which he had projected his fantasies. (Bruffee 1983, 51; italics in the original)

In these genre criteria, Bruffee begins with the self's preoccupation with the Other ("the *ostensible purpose*") and then moves on to the self's return to the self ("the *real purpose*"). This movement is diametrically opposed to Girard's ideal 'novelistic' dynamic, namely the 'Romantic' self's recognition of a significant Other, the mimetic model. Nevertheless, Bruffee is close to Girard in the way he stresses the debilitating effects of the hero-worship of the Other on the self who is so entangled with his role model that he is unable to recognize the difference between the two selves – and therefore also unable to come to grips with what Girard would call interindividual psychology. Interindividual psychology, after all, is not tantamount to the kind of symbiosis that both Girard's mimetic subject and Bruffee's elegiac narrator begin with before being presented with the chance to overcome it.

The narrator's debilitating symbiosis with another character takes on decidedly voyeuristic overtones. Remaining a passive bystander, observing and watching instead of participating and acting is an important feature of Bruffee's elegiac narrator. Bruffee (1983, 27) borrows the term "observer-hero narrative" from Lawrence Buell.<sup>108</sup> In Bruffee's opinion, his own genre formulation, the elegiac romance, is a particular sub-category of the observer-hero narrative (Bruffee 1983, 26-31), while he also stresses that the narrators are not merely observers of their heroes' curiosities as Buell would have it (Bruffee 1983, 29), but rather, as "squires," "share their knights' obsessions vicariously, serving them in attendance [...]" (Bruffee 1983, 39).<sup>109</sup>

Although Girard does not contemplate voyeurism as such, he nevertheless cites it as a by-product of mimetic desire at large; for example, in his reading of *Hamlet*, he notes that citizens in the rotten state of Denmark are consumed by "passion for watching without being watched," "propensity to voyeurism and spying" (Girard 2004, 284). The infamous Danish rot is for Girard nothing more or less than a full-fledged sacrificial crisis, with every subject immersed in a crippling rivalry with his or her significant Other.

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<sup>108</sup> Buell, Lawrence. 1979. "Observer-Hero Narrative." In *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 21 (Spring, 1979). Pp. 93-111.

<sup>109</sup> Although the voyeurism of vicarious living should be stressed in both Buell's observer-hero narrative and Bruffee's elegiac romance, it should be noted that there are differences between merely observatory and truly elegiac narrators. This difference is, at least, essential to Bruffee himself (cf. Bruffee 1983, 29) for whom Buell's "observer" is not sufficiently engaged and invested in the emulation of and identification with his hero. In this sense, Bruffee's narrator is more similar to Girard's imitating subject. To clarify his point about the mental and emotional engagement between the narrator and his hero, Bruffee states that the narrator of Conrad's *Under Western Eyes* (1911) is too much of an observer, and therefore this novel is *not* an elegiac romance (ibid.).

Girard would no doubt harbour reservations about Bruffee's delineation of observing and acting since the latter would spell a romantic pursuit of heroic autonomy.<sup>110</sup> However, there are notable similarities between Girard's mimetic and Bruffee's elegiac hypothesis. Bruffee's view of the elegiac mode of narration is that it provides knowledge to the narrator, a conclusion that echoes Girard's point of the 'novelistic' subject gaining "better knowledge of Others" (Girard 1976, 298) through the novelistic conversion, namely a narrative moment when the main character consciously gives up mimetic desire in the end.

However fruitful Bruffee's conception of the elegiac romance narrative might be to my general approach, it should be clarified that I am not applying it to my material wholesale. Indeed, almost none of my novelistic examples fit the strict or 'pure' definition put forward by Bruffee. The texts analyzed are too 'interdividual' and reciprocal in their character interactions to meet Bruffee's criterium of an aloof hero figure not really paying attention to his one-sidedly devoted "squire" – and conversely, a contended squire who makes no real effort at usurpation, even impotently and only in his mind. In their problematic and tragic narrative detours, these novels present characters more prone to double binds than are the narrators and heroes of elegiac romances as defined by Bruffee.<sup>111</sup>

Bruffee's conception of the prime narrative function of elegiac romances is linked to the poetics of trauma narrative as proposed by, among others, Peter Brooks and Cathy Caruth. Like these psychoanalytically oriented critics, Bruffee also stresses the therapeutic importance of symbolic re-enactment of the past:

The narrator recovers the coherence of his inner world by drawing the past out of himself in telling the tale. This method works for him, first, because to narrate is to transform remembered experience into symbol; and second, because this process of

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<sup>110</sup> It would seem, that whereas Girard would like to get rid of romantic heroism altogether, Bruffee, though critical of heroic cults and ultra-individualism, is more moderate in his demystification and more concerned with shifting the hero's halo from him to his elegy-singing observer. Bruffee thus implicitly advocates 'the hero of one's own life' approach instead of a more radical 'interdividuality' preferred by Girard. True, Bruffee describes the elegiac romance genre as inherently "a-heroic" (as opposed to anti-heroic; Bruffee 1983, 56). However, he retains traces of a healthy and wholesome individuality that Girard would no doubt consider a bit too romantic: "Elegiac romance is the drama of an obsessive hero-maker struggling to become his own person" (Bruffee 1983, 56; the italics are original; but I would like to underline Bruffee's phrase "*to become his own person*" – not a very 'interdividual' conclusion, that one!). Bruffee's very distinction between a-heroes and anti-heroes, between a Nick Carraway and an underground man (cf. Bruffee 1983, 55-56) appears slightly facetious when compared to Girard's exemplary mimeticists, among whom he includes figures as seemingly disparate as Julien Sorel and the said narrator of *Notes from the Underground*.

<sup>111</sup> It is interesting, that Bruffee should mention as one of the examples demonstrating the one-sidedness of the narrator's engagement with his hero the same work Girard finds more intensely mimetic, namely Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*. Bruffee notes that, when it comes to Marcel's adulation of Swann, the elder man does not reciprocate this adulation (Bruffee 1983, 179). In his reading of Proust, Girard stresses the mimeticism of most of the characters, thus implicitly rendering Swann equally mimetic, though not necessarily in relation to the narrator.

symbolizing does more than merely represent. To symbolize is to effect significant mental development. By symbolizing, Ernst Cassirer says in *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, we separate or extract the material symbolized from “the constant flux of the contents of consciousness.” This extraction “fixes” the material so that we can then “confront it in imagination as something past and yet not vanished.”<sup>112</sup> (Bruffee 1983, 52)

With the help of Cassirer, Bruffee further demonstrates the tension between the past and the present, the traumatic events as they happened and their narrative recapture in symbolic form. Brooks and Caruth would perhaps hesitate to align themselves with this positivist encapsulation of a successful symbolic capture of actual history. Nevertheless, both Bruffee and the more poststructuralist trauma theorists seem to agree about the vital importance of the symbolizing pursuit.<sup>113</sup>

Though the significance of time and memory, respectively, are not often emphasized in mimetic theory, Girard’s collaborator Jean-Michel Oughourlian stresses their inherently mimetic dimension:

Indeed, time does not exist in human experience except in the form of memory. And memory is mimetic; it is the capacity to repeat, to reproduce what one has already experienced. This back-and-forth movement between the present and the past is an effort of restoration, an imitation of past images re-presented in consciousness. (Oughourlian 2010, 78)

Not only is memory representing temporal events of mimesis, it is re-enacting mimetic desire itself in recalling the presence of the past mediator of desire – who may not be so “past” after all. But memory is also the medium through which to deal with mimetic desire and very possibly repudiate its negative aspects, such as resentment, envy and masochistic self-loathing – namely the ‘Romantic lie’ overlaying the ‘novelistic truth.’

The following chapter focuses on a character’s contemplation of the marks and traces left by the model of desire who is no longer physically present in the character’s presence. Therefore the role of memory and the passing of time are motifs brought to the fore. Chapter 6.1. focuses on the subject’s reminiscence of the model, or “hero,” by his or her disciple, or “squire,” and will combine Girard’s mimetic theory with Bruffee’s ‘elegiac’ model in a

<sup>112</sup> Cassirer, Ernst. 1953. *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*. Volume 1, *Language*. Translated by Ralph Manheim. New Haven: Yale University Press. Pp. 89-93. /cit. Bruffee (1983, 52).

<sup>113</sup> Though Bruffee is careful in his use of “psychological” vocabulary so as not commit himself to the rigorously scientific meaning of the word (Bruffee 1983, 133), he does view the narrative process of the elegiac romance as analogous to the therapeutic treatment of psychical damage: “To put the matter in oversimplified Freudian terms, it is as if the narrator had been traumatized before he begins to tell his tale, had been the captive of unresolved unconscious pain and conflict. By revealing and understanding the trauma, through telling his tale, he resolves the neurosis” (Bruffee 1983, 134).

reading of *What I Loved* and *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*. In chapter 6.2. I will also employ some psychoanalytic literary theory about traumatic affectations of the story world of *The Secret History* and *Amsterdam*, and their reworking in narrative form. Not surprisingly, my reading of these theories will emphasize the trauma as something manifested in another character (and not just conceptual anxiety in the face of impersonal phenomena such as the fear of death or existential despair over a lack of meaning, etc.). Combining Girard's idea about the 'novelistic truth' with Brooks's Freudian conception of the 'master plot,' I will argue that the narrator's unsuccessful attempts at arriving at the metaphoric stasis mirror the life-affirming pursuit to repudiate this venture because it is revealed as a 'Romantic lie.' Therefore, while congratulating the trauma theorists for their insightful analogies between psychoanalytic practice and literary discourse, I will nevertheless turn away from their problem-solving strategies because these betray an overly pacifying intent to settle for a catharsis rather than a conversion. To put it in another way, the 'traumatological' approach to narrative does not sufficiently consider the narrator's (or the implied author's) capacity to transcend the illusory compromises that the Freudian master plot facilitates in its romantic dualism of Eros and Thanatos.

Finally, in chapter 6.3., I will draw a vital distinction between two types of 'mimetic' narrative, what I call (*false*) *gospel* and *elegy*. These terms are used very liberally and do not aspire to new genre definitions. What distinguishes the gospel and elegy from each other is the way they deal with the problematic and even 'traumatic' character relationships; a gospel still clings to the metaphysical difference between the self and the Other, whereas the elegy (in a manner that recalls Bruffee's 'elegiac romance' but is more radically 'interdividual' and 'mimetic') acknowledges the fundamental sameness of the 'disciple' and his or her 'master.' This said, it is noteworthy to point out that not all novels dealt with in this study fit neatly within either of these categories. In some cases (such as *The Secret History*) the end product, though leaning heavily towards the elegiac mode (in my sense of the word, not Bruffee's), nevertheless retains major traits of a 'gospel.'

## 6.1 Imitators and Observers

In his book, *Elegiac Romance: Cultural Change and Loss of the Hero in Modern Fiction* (1983), Bruffee establishes a contrast between what he calls *psychological* fiction and *epistemological* fiction, with elegiac romances more closely resembling the latter category.

The psychological tendency of the stream-of-consciousness approach found in the more explicitly Modernist writers like Joyce and Woolf stresses the rapid progression of time in instances too atomistic and too much like “time-stop photography” (Bruffee 1983, 61) to facilitate an essential change in character development that would correspond to a disillusionment with the false hero or a conversion repudiating the idolatry directed towards his or her person. On the contrary, the epistemological impulse detected by Bruffee in Conrad especially is concerned with changes undergone by the hero-worshipper during major shifts in time. This change over time may not be a sudden or easy one, but it is nonetheless possible and hoped-for:

Elegiac romance challenges belief in sudden alteration of the self in quite another way. Unlike the psychological novel, it is optimistic about the human potential for inner change. But it implies that change of that order occurs infrequently and is likely to be slow, painful, inconspicuous, partial, often difficult to recognize, and not always entirely welcome: what one becomes may take some getting used to. Elegiac romance also implies that inner change involves understanding. It occurs only with disillusionment, as a result of insight into the nature and effects of the illusions one has held. (Bruffee 1983, 61)

Bruffee’s elegiac criteria appear to be more than amply met in Hustvedt’s *What I Loved*: a first-person narrator telling the story about his ‘hero,’ a friend who is dead at the beginning of the narrative process; a voyeuristic stance adopted by the narrator in relation to his friend who, as opposed to him, is a doer (an artist) instead of a watcher (an art historian); a realization in the end of the narrative that the story told is even more about the narrator’s self than the hero’s otherness (changing the emphasis of the title from What – or rather “Who” – *I Loved* to *What I Loved*). Leo’s dissection of Bill’s artworks often takes the form of projection, and with the loss of his friend, Leo almost literally loses what Bruffee calls the narrator’s “screen” onto which he reflects his own fantasies (Bruffee 1983, 51).

Despite Leo’s relative objectivity and his lack of overt rivalry – characteristics that make Hustvedt’s *What I Loved* the least conflictual of the novels studied in this thesis – as narrator he is not immune to what Bruffee describes as “the process by which we tend to transmute artists into heroic figures” (Bruffee 1983, 219). However, it is precisely Bill’s art that steers Leo successfully away from the path of envy and inferiority complex, as opposed to sucking him into such double-binding vortexes of mimetic rivalry. Leo’s more ambivalent attitudes towards his hero become evident in other arenas, such as sexual desire towards Bill’s love objects and paternal envy for Mark’s survival after Matthew’s death. However, the fact that Bill’s difference from Leo is most of the time happily acknowledged by the latter and is never

seriously challenged in the end suggests that Hustvedt's implied author is not building a mimetic conflict proper between the men during Leo's narrative and therefore does not include a novelistic conversion that would unravel this relationship. However, I would suggest, that Leo's conversion is realized by his insight onto another relationship entirely, namely that between Mark and Giles. By seeing what goes wrong in that mimetic interaction, Leo learns what might have gone wrong in his interaction with Bill. To put it terms of Ryan's Possible Worlds formulation: the tragedy that unfolds in *the textual actual world* of *What I Loved* regarding Mark and Giles is recognized in Leo's *textual alternative possible world* as a potential tragedy that could unfold in the interaction between himself and Bill in their textual actual world. It could be argued more cynically, that the relationship between Mark and Giles is a sacrificial surrogate projection of mimetic rivalry that Leo refuses to acknowledge, thus rendering the whole novel sacrificial. Nevertheless, I would lean towards the more positive and 'conversional' ending, although I admit that this explanation is not without problems, ones that rise from the residual 'Romanticism' of Hustvedt's implied author and reader alike. This Romanticism is not, however, enough to drown the mimetic insights to be derived from the characters' dynamic.

There is one particularly relevant 'mimetic' issue pertaining to Leo's relationship with Bill, and that is the question of genius. A genius is, of course, by definition an individual whose very individuality is highlighted as a result of his or her having risen above the conventional collective standards of achievement. But, if the genius is recognized for objective reasons – by virtue of producing better works of art, scientific discoveries, athletic results, etc. – there should not be any talk of inequality of persons, only talent. Unfortunately, as is shown for example in the film *Amadeus* (1984), directed by Miloš Forman and written by Peter Shaffer, geniuses like Mozart often tend to be regarded as divinities among the mediocre mortals like Salieri – especially by those 'Salieris' themselves.<sup>114</sup> In *What I Loved*,

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<sup>114</sup> The screenplay of *Amadeus* was adapted by Shaffer from his own 1979 stage play which itself was inspired by various Mozart and Salieri legends. These legends portray Salieri as consumed by envy towards Mozart's prodigious musical gifts in contrast to his own mediocrity. When considered against the actual biography of Salieri, the story of both his artistic and moral failings is strikingly unfair and indeed something of a scapegoating myth. However, the film narrative offers a very nuanced anthropological insight into the Romantic cult of genius. The fictional Salieri's equating Mozart's undeniable, objective talent with a privileged relationship to God, and moreover, his considering this talent as God's deliberate affront to his own person despite his vocal religious piety, exquisitely demonstrates how difficult it is to differentiate between metaphysical prestige and concrete objects.

Another 'mimetic' feature in *Amadeus* is the explicitly doubled psyche of Salieri who simultaneously worships Mozart and does everything in his power to thwart his career. When telling his father confessor about Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, underrated by the Viennese court but secretly acknowledged as a masterpiece by court composer Salieri himself, Salieri admits that, "[t]hrough my influence I saw to it that *Don Giovanni* was played only five times in Vienna. But in secret I went to everyone of those five, worshipping the sound that I alone

there is a similar opposition between a ‘Salieri’ and a ‘Mozart’: that of Teddy Giles and Bill, with the former being a false genius hailed by the prevailing Zeitgeist and the latter being a true genius whose works are predicted to stand the test of time. Also, similarly to *Amadeus*, the false genius is morbidly fascinated by the true genius, while the true genius hardly returns the compliment; in this way, at least, Bruffee’s depiction of an aloof hero has its day in connection with *What I Loved*. Both Forman and Shaffer’s film and Hustvedt’s novel downplay the resentment suffered by the true genius, although they do occasionally give hints to the reciprocity of rivals. However, through their understatement, the film and the novel are guilty of a certain Romantic mythology of difference.

To dwell briefly on the parallels and contrasts between these two ‘artist narratives’ with special attention paid to the aspect of memory, it is worth stating that their endings are diametrically opposed. *Amadeus* ends with a painful yet partly dishonest confession by Salieri to the naïve young priest who functions as his narratee that culminates in the “patron saint” of all mediocrities (DVD chapter 45) madly exclaiming his deranged gospel to his congregation of fellow inmates in a lunatic asylum, with Mozart’s immortal laughter issuing from the film’s extradiegetic soundtrack which then fades into the sound of his music being played over the end credits. Forced to face the undisputed fact of Mozart’s musical genius, Salieri has also resigned to his purely subjective conviction of his mediator’s divinity and superhumanity. This recognition is far removed from both Girard’s novelistic conversion and Bruffee’s elegiac conclusion. The fact that Mozart literally gets the last ‘word’ (i.e., laughter and music) should not draw the implied viewer of the film into complicity with Salieri’s mimetic delusions of ‘divine’ retribution.

By contrast, *What I Loved* ends with Leo’s unproblematic reassertion of Bill’s genius, but also more importantly with Leo’s renouncing his sexual ambitions regarding Violet, the object transfigured by the mediator. Unlike Salieri with Mozart, Leo has never explicitly desired Bill’s creative powers. But he has desired Bill’s love interests and his paternal access to Mark, Matthew’s surviving ‘twin.’

The same unproblematic relationship to art is evident in Bill himself. Unlike in another artist novel, Mann’s *Doktor Faustus* (1947), there is no implication of the narrator attributing false ingenuity to his hero in *What I Loved* (cf. Bruffee’s reading of Mann; Bruffee 1983, 161). On the contrary, Hustvedt’s implied author clearly sides with Leo’s assertion of Bill’s genius, which does not in any way compromise his emotional life (by draining him of love, as

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could seem to hear” (DVD chapter 30). Salieri regards himself as “a man splitting in half” (ibid.), and quite rightly so, since as a ‘mimetic’ subject he wants to be Mozart and still remain Salieri.



the Faustian bargain does the composer Leverkühn in Mann's novel). Whenever Bill has moral qualms about his familial choices, for example, they are not derived from his selfish dedication to art at the expense of human relationships; his apologetic confession to Leo about having chosen his own well-being over that of Mark by divorcing Lucille and marrying Violet is not directly attendant to his thriving as an artist, since the fact that Violet, unlike Lucille, explicitly encourages his work, is a testament to Violet's emotional generosity at large.

With respect to Bruffee's elegiac formula, the character of Bill both corresponds to and departs from the hero's definition; he is much too attached to his squire Leo whose friendship he reciprocates. Still, there is something of the tragic clinging on to past mistakes and traumas that Bill shares with Bruffee's model, and the same is true of Leo's narrative modesty:

The narrator's hero, as the narrator remembers him, in almost every case regards the past as something external to himself that stands as a barrier to his own success. He therefore futilely rejects the past, overvalues it, or finds it an intolerable burden—or all of these at once. This effort is futile because in most cases the values of the narrator's hero are irredeemably fixed in the past. Nevertheless, he regards his own quest, typically, as an attempt to recapture, rectify, challenge, or throw off the past by struggling heroically with its present results, representatives, or other unfortunate residue. The narrator, more modestly, regrets mainly his own past and seeks only to come to terms with that past by remembering it and telling a tale adequate to the complexity of feeling that that memory evokes. (Bruffee 1983, 48)

In *What I Loved*, Bill is remarkably free from the kind of destructive nostalgia described by Bruffee – and as such strikingly opposed to Henry in *The Secret History*. However, he harbours an obsession regarding his absent father, as well as vague guilt about Lucille's suicidal behaviour. These negative preoccupations with his past relationships become heightened and acquire almost nihilistic and hysterical proportions when symptoms of Mark's general unresponsiveness begin to surface. One incident has Bill demonstrate the more histrionic side of his personality by drunkenly exclaiming the meaninglessness of the universe:

At that moment Bill stopped walking. He let go of Violet, looked up at the night sky, spread his arms, and said loudly, "We know nothing. We know absolutely nothing about anything." His loud voice carried down the street. "Nothing!" He boomed the word again with obvious satisfaction.

Violet reached for Bill's hand and tugged at him. "Now that we've settled that, let's go home," she said. He didn't resist her. Violet held his hand as he shuffled down the block with his head lowered and his shoulders hunched. I thought he looked like a child being led home by his mother. (*WIL*, 200-201)

Bill's existentialist antics are de-romanticized by Violet's ironic understatement and Leo's likening his friend to a submissive child. The irony is interesting, since often enough Bill is rendered authentically heroic by both Violet and Leo, with the covert support of Hustvedt's implied author. Keeping Bruffee's juxtaposition of the hero and narrator in mind, however, Bill's Sisyphean drama is something that narratorial modesty would not allow Leo himself to showcase.

What further highlights Bill's unromantic mimeticism is the actual reason for his nihilistic outburst, namely that "it might have been rooted in what had been revealed earlier: Mark happened to have chosen a friend whose staunchest supporter was the man who had written the cruellest review of his father's work to date" (*WIL*, 201). Leo's speculation here refers to Mark's newly found attachment to Giles to whose escapades the main characters or the reader for that matter are not yet privy, but who is known to be the protégé of Bill's self-proclaimed archenemy, the art critic Henry Hasseborg. Again, the cause of character frustration is revealed as mimetic and relational.

Memorializing the presence of the significant Other is even more central a preoccupation in Spark's *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, even if the employment of a third-person rather than a first-person narrator renders its status as a memoir – and confession – more problematic. The narrator's omniscience, however, facilitates breathtakingly effortless shifts to take place between different time-levels and equips the reader with a kind of bird's eye-view onto the development of the main character Sandy Stranger's mimetic desire towards Miss Brodie.

Time in itself is an aspect of Spark's novel that requires immediate attention, and a lot has been written about its use of prolepses (e.g., Rimmon-Kenan 2002, 49; Nicol 2010, 112), as well as its ironic analogies to the Calvinist doctrine of predestination (e.g., Carruthers, Kermode, Massie). Most importantly, perhaps, it is the eponymous "prime" of Miss Brodie that demands the temporal aspect to be taken into serious account when discussing the novel.

With the themes of time and memory on the one hand and the centrality of an awe-inspiring, larger-than-life character on the other calling such pressing attention to themselves, it is surprising that these features have not been studied together, at least not as systematically as they undoubtedly deserve. Is not Sandy's reminiscence of *her shared time with Miss Brodie and her prime* of essence to the narrative?

While being visited by a fan of her book, the now-cloistered Sandy is encouraged to recall her past influences the speculated plurality of which is slyly singularized:

‘The influences of one’s teens are very important,’ said the man.

‘Oh yes,’ said Sandy, ‘even if they provide something to react against.’

‘What was your biggest influence, then, Sister Helena? Was it political, personal? Was it Calvinism?’

‘Oh no,’ said Sandy. ‘But there was a Miss Jean Brodie in her prime.’ (*PMJB*, 34-35)

Sandy’s answer to her interviewer is tantamount to a signed confession. But a confession of what? No less than her faith in her one-time deity, Miss Brodie. Ironically enough, Sandy, now nominally “transfigured” as Sister Helena and anointed as a bride of Christ, admits to having in the past worshipped an idol rather than God. With enough time distancing her from “[t]he influences of [her] teens,” Sandy is now ready to contemplate her personal history and its intertwining with the history of Miss Brodie, namely, what one might call her *being with* her teacher.

“The being with,” or *Mittsein*, is a term taken from Heidegger’s phenomenology, and it is also useful in the context of mimetic theory. Girard employs Heidegger’s *Mittsein* in his analysis of the existential relationship between Jesus and Peter on the one hand and between Peter and those who prompt him to utter his denial of Jesus on the other (Girard 1989, 150-151). As Peter, feeling alone and isolated after Jesus’s capture, makes his entry into a circle of people who are keeping warm – and, more importantly *keeping company* (*ibid.*) – he is simultaneously trying to enter the *Mittsein* of this community. Having lost his *Mittsein* in relation to his imperilled master, Peter is therefore seeking a replacement *being with*. In *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, Sandy, residing in a convent that, as a community of disciples (i.e., nuns), is also seeking a replacement for the Brodie set, but, like Miss Brodie among *her* peers, Sandy is now facing the same kind of cold shoulder (as opposed to a warm fire) that was her usurped mentor’s share at Marcia Blane’s in the 1930’s. It is as if the “other sisters” (*PMJB*, 35) were silently asking Sister Helena the question she is trying to repress in her mimetic psyche – just like Peter tries to repress his *Mittsein* in relation to Jesus through his more vocal denial in the face of his accusers who interrogate him out loud<sup>115</sup> – namely: Were you not keeping company with a Miss Jean Brodie when she was in her prime?

As disciples go, Sandy is both Judas and Peter, in that, like Judas, she is scandalized by her teacher and betrays her to hostile authorities, and like Peter, she has lived in denial of her past being with her teacher. In the end, Sandy is offered a chance to become even more like Peter (and less like Judas) by revoking her denial and acknowledging her and Miss Brodie’s

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<sup>115</sup> In *The Scapegoat*, Girard concludes, that “Jesus’ arrest seems to have destroyed any possible future *being with Jesus*, and Peter seems to have lost all memory of *having been* (Girard 1989, 150; italics in the original).

*Mittsein*. Although the other nuns know nothing of Sandy's mimetic fascination with her human idol, Miss Brodie, they do blame her for "ha[ving] too much to bear from the world since she published her psychological book which was so unexpectedly famed" (*PMJB*, 35). Sandy's book was inspired by her *being with* Miss Brodie, and her new community is rightly suspicious that her loyalties lie elsewhere and that she is too "world[ly]," even after her self-proclaimed "transfiguration," for the convent. The nuns are thus re-enacting the suspicions of Peter's accusers who are jealously prejudiced against an outsider. As has been already noted in chapter five, Sandy's fellow nuns are not representative of the vertical transcendence they purport to guard against possible heretics. Their community, at least when marked by their unified front against the scapegoated Sandy, is exactly as 'worldly' as they accuse Sandy of being. In this way, at any rate, they are not true brides of Christ – nor the true inheritors of the Catholic Church, i.e., a church founded on *Peter's* succession!<sup>116</sup>

But – and this is a big but – neither is Sandy, at least not before the very end of Spark's novel. Sandy's acknowledgment of her teacher's influence is not comparable to Peter's repentance which also entails the rightful divinization of Jesus. Rather, Sandy's reclaiming her repressed imitation of Miss Brodie is tantamount to her recognition of this imitation as idolatry, an *imitatio Satanae*. This is not to say that Miss Brodie is *the* Antichrist, or even that the teacher is more Satanic than the pupil, but more correctly, that the negative mimetic desire experienced by Sandy towards Miss Brodie-as-mediator is the reversal of *imitatio Christi*. Therefore, if we were to treat Sandy's confession as a novelistic conversion, it would not consist so much in discovering vertical transcendence *ex nihilo*, but, on the contrary, in unmasking the falseness of the false prophet, the deviation of hitherto deviated transcendence. It is only after this direction of transcendence has been, as it were, corrected, that vertical transcendence as some form of positive essence or existence can present itself to the converted subject. This vertical reconfiguration of mediation would entail a future being with the rightful mediator, such as Peter's being with Jesus according to Girard.

On the whole, if we follow Bruffee's poetics in our discernment of character relations and solutions thereof, we might very well end up stressing the difference between the subject and

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<sup>116</sup> In Girard's analysis of Peter's denial, he makes the point that the *Mittsein* in relation to Jesus is not tantamount to a parochial community such as the one of Peter's acusers who recognize Peter as a follower of Jesus because of his Galilean accent. Rather, the being with Jesus is a "cosmopolitan" existence; the Gospels "have no accent because they are all accents" (Girard 1989, 153). By discriminating against Sandy – who, incidentally, has an affected accent because of her English mother – in the name of their unworldliness, the Scottish nuns are actually localizing a very universal message of togetherness.

his or her Other.<sup>117</sup> If, on the other hand, we follow Girard's interpretive route, we must establish an underlying sameness of mimetic rivals. However, if there is a difference in the two imitators, then it will pertain to the possibility of novelistic conversion, with one subject attaining that conversion and the other possibly not. In that case, Bruffee's and Girard's approaches, though admittedly different, share substantial common ground with respect to their respective solutions of inter-characteral problems.

## 6.2 'The Other' as Trauma and Narrative Motivation

"Recapturing the past is to destroy a little of one's pride," writes Girard in *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel* (Girard 1976, 38). The psychologist Willem A. Wagenaar echoes this statement when he concludes in his article, "Is memory self-serving?" (1994), that it can be "painful" to re-process old concepts that were once born out of a *fast updating*, but then undergo a *slow updating*:

Concepts that are changed through slow updating should have been tested thoroughly before they were stored, because if they are wrong, it will take a long time to correct them. When new conditions render the old concepts useless, there is a long and painful period in which the old concepts exert their detrimental influence. (Wagenaar 1994, 192)

In Hustvedt's *What I Loved*, what initially prompts Leo to narrate his life story is the discovery of a group of letters written from Violet to Bill in which she confesses her love for him without yet knowing for sure whether she and Bill will end up together or whether he chooses to stay with Lucille. As it turns out, Bill and Violet will start a life together, with Mark's emotional uprooting – very similar to that affecting Teddy Giles (or, as his real name turns out to be, Allan Johnson) in his early childhood – being the fatal collateral damage to their marital bliss. Leo is eventually forced to take on more than he bargained for and

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<sup>117</sup> The difference between the elegiac narrator and his repudiated hero is put into question by Heta Pyrhönen in her reading of Raymond Chandler's *The Long Goodbye* (1953) as an elegiac romance. Pyrhönen argues that the novel's narrator-detective, Philip Marlowe, "[...] ostensibly starts out by underlining his difference from his double [=Marlowe's murderous friend, Terry Lennox], for he is the 'I' that is following a distinct 'you'; he further emphasizes this seeming difference by triumphing over the double (i.e., by staying alive). Yet by insisting that 'I would be you had I not taken care,' he sees in the double *only* a picture of himself. Difference gradually gives way to sameness, for what the double is as himself is not as important as what he is as the narrator's projection" (Pyrhönen 1999, 254-255; italics in the original).

For Pyrhönen, *The Long Goodbye* is strikingly different from Bruffee's archetypal elegiac romance, Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, in that Fitzgerald's narrator, Nick Carraway, moves from sameness to difference, whereas with Chandler's narrator it is the other way round (ibid.)

performs in the process of his narration a slow updating procedure. Most strikingly, these updates concern Mark, and after the younger man has betrayed Leo's confidence on a dizzying number of occasions, Leo must acknowledge the seriousness of his own gullibility – and the reason for his willingness to believe Mark despite his better instincts.

The same kind of destruction of one's pride that underlies *What I Loved*, is also a forceful motive behind the main character's narrative in Tarrt's *The Secret History*, in which Richard Papen repeatedly falls short of fulfilling his other forceful motive, namely that of shaping a psychologically consistent and aesthetically pleasing self-image. This pursuit of an ideal self is constantly bogged down by his admission, no matter how provisional, of a dependency on Henry Winter's auspicious model figure. Henry does not merely represent Richard's repressed desire for the Other's being; rather, *Henry's being is what Richard represses*. Or, more correctly, his *Mittsein* with his friend. To paraphrase Oughourlian's take on Freud: The unconscious is the other. By "the other," Oughourlian quite literally means another concrete human being, not some Lacanian imaginary or symbolic position.<sup>118</sup>

In *What I Loved*, Leo realizes that his past is not just past, but that through his memories as well as concrete memorabilia he hordes in his drawer, he can summon various affectations of his life history in front of his eyes (so to speak, since at the time of his narrative discourse he is almost blind). This sensation of the circularity of time (*WIL*, 355) hits Leo one moment when, long after Bill has died, Leo remembers him the way he was

[...] in Vermont then, walking out the door of Bowery Two just before dinner. I saw him through the kitchen window of the Vermont house, and although it was an uncommonly lucid memory, I felt no emotion or nostalgia. I was merely a voyeur in my own life, a cold spectator who looks on at other people going about their daily routines. (*WIL*, 355)

Although there are other people present in the memory, including his absconded wife Erica and deceased son Matthew, as well as his unrequited love Violet, it is still Bill who commands Leo's contemplative mode as a kind of mnemonic leitmotif. Bill's prevalence in Leo's memory is a further indication of the way his mimetic desire has served as the music to his dance of time, as it were. It is therefore not surprising that it is Leo's book about Bill that

<sup>118</sup> As a psychiatrist, Oughourlian is quite positivistic in that he grounds at least a part of this hypothesis in the exact sciences, with a special emphasis on the study of "mirror neurons": "Perhaps mirror neurons will make it possible for our culture to accept the reality of mimetic desire and therefore the otherness of desire, because they will remove the issue of responsibility and guilt from desire, whose origin will no longer be hidden away in a part of the psyche arbitrarily isolated under the name of "the unconscious," but will finally be scientifically understood as located in the *other*, on the level of neurons and physiology" (Oughourlian 2010, 93-94; italics in the original).

promises to double for his novelistic narrative. The book, a work still in progress while Leo is finishing his narration, could be interpreted as having been inspired by Bill's final and unfinished work, the video entitled "Icarus" that consists in documentary footage about children. Bill obviously identified with Daedalus and the guilt marring the mythical father figure who "had risked too much for his freedom and, because of it, he had lost his son" (*WIL*, 337). Leo is also troubled by his 'fatherly' past with Mark. Through Bill's "Icarus" he has nevertheless come to grips with the fluidity of innocence and guilt, since, after all, even a towering criminal Superman like Teddy Giles "had once been a cute kid with blond hair and protruding ears" (*WIL*, 360).

In *The Secret History*, Richard occupies the position of what narratologists would call "extradiegetic" narrator, namely a narrator who has the highest authority over the narrative hierarchy (cf. Rimmon-Kenan 2002, 95; Genette 1980, 228). But since he is simultaneously a character in his own narrative, Richard is also a "homodiegetic" narrator (cf. Rimmon-Kenan 2002, 96; Genette 1980, 244-245). To highlight these narrator functions, Richard writes down (instead of merely speaking out) his narrative which is turned into a memoir of sorts. Richard also explicitly emphasizes his ownership of the story he narrates: "I suppose at one time in my life I might have had any number of stories, but now there is no other. This is the only story I will ever be able to tell" (*SH*, 2). However, there is a paradox in his appropriation of the story, since his insistence of having no choice but to tell this particular story he is implying that it is not he who owns the story but the story that owns him.

As is consistent with Bruffee's definition of 'epistemological fiction,' Richard quite overtly dramatizes his act of narration, displaying it in full view of his narratee instead of offering a camouflaged peephole through which the latter can safely gaze at the story world characters and events. However, even while keeping in mind Bruffee's reservations about 'psychological fiction' which he deems voyeuristic,<sup>119</sup> Richard's narrative does deal with traumatic subject matter and could also benefit from psychoanalytic theory, especially those

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<sup>119</sup> Bruffee distinguishes the epistemological novel from the psychological through the differences in narratorial "gregariousness": "Reading a psychological novel is an intrusive, almost voyeuristic act. We peep surreptitiously for a few fleeting moments or hours through the half-ajar shutters of someone else's mind. Elegiac romance, in contrast, dramatizes an active relationship between narrator and audience, and that dramatic relationship is structurally and thematically integral to the fiction. Reading elegiac romance is a gregarious act. We are met at the door by an entrepreneurial host, and while we are shown the labyrinthine hallways and dim rooms of the narrator's memory we are variously regaled, nagged, bullied, and conned" (Bruffee 1983, 61-62).

Girard's 'novelistic truth' is related to Bruffee's elegiac romance in that it too facilitates the narrator's shedding generous light on his past: "[...] Proust's narrator moves freely from room to room in the 'museum without walls' of his existence" (Girard 1976, 232).

contemporary developments of Freud by literary scholars such as Peter Brooks and Cathy Caruth that consider *the repetition compulsion* as a dimension of narrative fiction.

While ‘epistemologically’ dramatizing the act of his narrative performance in relation to his narratee, Richard maintains that what motivates his discourse is some traumatic event which will be elaborated later on:

Does such a thing as ‘the fatal flaw,’ that showy dark crack running down the middle of a life exist outside literature? I used to think it didn’t. Now I think it does. And I think mine is this: a morbid longing for the picturesque at all costs.

*A moi. L’histoire d’une de mes folies.*<sup>120</sup> (*SH*, 5; italics in the original)

Richard has obviously decided that the best way to try and make sense of his trauma (whatever, or rather, whomever, that trauma may be) is through imitating literature, even if what he recounts is ‘real,’ something “outside literature.”<sup>121</sup> And although he ostensibly writes for himself alone (“*A moi*”), Richard nevertheless addresses a narratee, albeit a silent agent who does not talk – or write – back (cf. Rimmon-Kenan 2002, 105), who may very well be himself projected as another. The silent agent addressed is nonetheless also a “you” (“How can I make you see it [...]”; *SH*, 224; “You see, then, how quick it was.”; *SH*, 310, etc.), and it would appear that Richard has established a narrative contract (Barthes 1970, 95-96<sup>122</sup> / cit. Brooks 1992, 216) with himself-as-other. In this way, Richard’s self becomes his own “desirer in the other” in order to render himself as someone “called to be desirable” (cf. Lacan 1991, 415<sup>123</sup> / cit. Brooks 1993, 210). This kind of duality might at first appear as a narratological equivalent to Girard’s mimetic splitting of the self as a form of doubling (cf. Girard 1987, 284<sup>124</sup>), but it can also be seen in a more positive light, namely as a possibility to achieve the unity of the self through the novelistic truth that awaits at the narrative’s end.

<sup>120</sup> The French quote, taken from Rimbaud’s *Une saison en enfer* (1873), serves not only Richard’s self-perceived foppishness, but is also thematically important in its allusiveness; Richard as narrator is in the present trying to make sense of the “season in Hell” that corresponds to the period of his association with Henry and the other Greek students. It also toys with the idea of lost youth and productivity, since when Richard attended Hampden College, he was 21 years old – the same age as when Rimbaud famously abandoned his writing career to pursue a more steady form of employment outside the Bohemian quarters of his reckless youth; also, Henry committed suicide while in his early twenties, whereas Richard as a survivor is already in his late twenties when he begins to narrate their shared story.

<sup>121</sup> In her reader’s guide to Tartt’s novel, Tracy Hargreaves also acknowledges the significance of the “extra-textual” claims made by the narrator in that Richard is “putting his own whereabouts outside the fictive frame” (Hargreaves 2001, 24).

<sup>122</sup> In *Reading for the Plot*, Brooks writes, that “[a]ll storytelling [...] is contractual: it asks for something in return for what it supplies” (Brooks 1992, 216), referring to Barthes’s *S/Z* (Roland Barthes, Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1970) and its English translation by Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974).

<sup>123</sup> Lacan, Jacques. 1991. *Le séminaire*, volume 8, *Le transfert*. Paris: Editions du Seuil.

<sup>124</sup> “[...] the rigorous symmetry between the mimetic partners [...] must bring about two things [...]: the ability to look at the other person, the mimetic *double*, as an *alter ego*, and the matching capacity to establish a *double*



In the Lacanian terms adopted by Brooks, Richard, like the Monster in Shelley's *Frankenstein*, has been led to "an overvaluation of language," language in the end being unable to fulfill desire (cf. Brooks 's reading of Mary Shelley's novel; 1993, 211); in Girardian terms (which do not differentiate between the symbolic – i.e., linguistic –, imaginary or real stages), the level of narration merely confirms the mimetic rule of the story world level, namely, that mimetic desire is in itself endless, whether directed towards an actual being (Henry) or a textual, anthropomorphous version of the actual being (Richard's narratee). In Girard's philosophy, the solution to this problem of desire run amok would be to redirect it onto a 'vertical' model, one that is not responsive to mimetic double binds: "Choice always involves choosing a model, and true freedom lies in the basic choice between a human or a divine model" (Girard 1976, 58). The desire itself, however, would not be quenched, but transformed. This transformation can only happen from within the individual subject, albeit an undeniably 'interdividual' individual subject.

Bruffee's elegiac and Girard's mimetic explanations would converge, however, in the way the narrator / imitator is dwarfed and diminished at the outset of his meeting his hero / model for the first time. Echoing Girard's analyses of secretly self-deprecating snobs who "fawn and cringe" before their mediators of snobbery (Girard 1976, 70), Bruffee writes:

Both [the narrator's] awe and her<sup>125</sup> sense of being weakened and unnerved in the presence of the person who is to become the hero of her tale are typical of the way the elegiac romance narrator's experience begins, an experience that resolves in telling the tale. (Bruffee 1983, 212)

This kind of heightened sense of inferiority is exactly what becomes dramatized in Richard's initial interactions with Henry:

‘How long have you studied the classics?’ said a voice at my elbow. It was Henry, who had turned in his chair to look at me.  
 ‘Two years,’ I said.  
 ‘What have you read in Greek?’  
 ‘The New Testament.’  
 ‘Well of course you’ve read *Koine*,’ he said crossly. ‘What else? Homer, surely. And the lyric poets.’

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inside oneself, through processes like reflection and consciousness (Girard 1987, 284; italics in the original). The narratological case of a narrator becoming his or her own narratee would be an instance of the latter anthropological capacity.

<sup>125</sup> In the description quoted Bruffee has deliberately chosen an example – rare in his opinion – of a female narrator and a female hero. The novel in question is Cather's *My Mortal Enemy* (1926), a text that is, interestingly enough, contemporaneous with Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, one of the male prototypes of the elegiac romance and an explicit intertext of Tartt's *The Secret History*.

This, I knew, was Henry's special bailiwick. I was afraid to lie.  
 'A little.'  
 'And Plato?'  
 'Yes.'  
 'All of Plato?'  
 'Some of Plato.'  
 'But all of it in translation.'  
 I hesitated, a moment too long. He looked at me, incredulous.  
 'No?'  
 I dug my hands into the pockets of my new overcoat. 'Most of it,' I said, which was far from true.  
 'Most of what? The dialogues, you mean? What about later things? Plotinus?'  
 'Yes,' I lied. I have never, to this day, read a word by Plotinus. (*SH*, 36-37; italics in the original)

It is clear from Richard's peculiar mix of subservience and boastfulness in the face of Henry's linguistic and literary interrogation ("He was like a policeman with the questions."; *SH*, 37) that Richard is answering to Henry's invitation to a kind of academic 'pissing contest' and that Richard, recognizing Henry's upper-hand, is treading a fine line: he does not want to play with fire and be forced to admit to his lying, but neither does he wish to appear completely ignorant of an issue so visibly important to his model.<sup>126</sup> However, with regard to his narratee, it is an entirely different matter: in his role as narrator, Richard is not afraid to admit his ignorance or his lies, and in fact quite openly displays the mimetic subterfuge he felt compelled to engage in at the time of his first genuine interaction with Henry. So even though Richard is at times playing cat and mouse with himself-as-narratee, avoiding full confession of his faults until the very last, his mimeticism has already gone through a great deal of modification and is now, at the moment he is telling his story, much more closer to a novelistic truth than was his more 'Romantic' and deceitful behavior during the time in which the story events took place.

Still, the actual achievement of 'novelistic' insight is anything but a given in Richard's narrative process. As Amit Marcus – who is keen to curtail Girard's emphasis on conversion (Marcus 2010, 209) – points out, narration can also perpetuate (destructive) mimetic desire instead of draining it (Marcus 2010, 209; 216). Furthermore, "narrative can even *be* mimetic desire, in the sense that it is motivated by the will to mimic the mediator and his desires" (Marcus 2010, 216; italics in the original).

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<sup>126</sup> De Haas has also made note that the academic aptitude of Tartt's characters is used as a mimetic competing device and far outweighs any objective interest in the contents of the discipline (de Haas 1994, 32).

Marcus's example is Grass's *Katz und Maus* (1961),<sup>127</sup> a novella that has the homodiegetic narrator at times address his friend (who very probably is no longer alive and whose death might have been facilitated by the narrator) as a narratee. In Tartt's novel, there is no such narrative device, nor are the narrator's mediator (Henry) and his victim (Bunny) the same person. Although the narrative structure of *The Secret History* makes the question of mimeticism more indirect (in Grass, there is no doubt that the narrator's relationship with his lost friend is the incentive of the whole narrative), it also provides Richard with more escape maneuvers, as he can with good conscience tip-toe around the issue of Henry's centrality to his story. Whereas in *Katz und Maus* it is clear from the start that Pilenz's narrative is about Mahlke, in *The Secret History* it is considerably less apparent that Richard's [*I*] '*histoire* [*a*] *moi*' is really a story told to himself and Henry, since, in a way, Henry's otherness has been duplicated in Richard's self-as-narratee.

Considering Richard's pursuit to make sense of his experiences through a well-crafted narrative, it could be deduced that the words "flaw" and "crack" do not merely denote the traumatic eventfulness of his life story, but also allude to the process of narration itself; if aestheticized properly, the flaws and the cracks become dramatically appealing moments in a cathartic continuum of narrative procession: the very "narratability" characterizing the Freudian masterplot (cf. Brooks 1992, 97). Therefore, the implied reader of Tartt's novel should take the narrator's discourse with a grain of salt – at least, before the cracks of the narrative become less "picturesque" and Richard is forced to let his mask drop in a self-deconstructive gesture aimed at what Girard would call the novelistic truth, namely a realization of the falseness inherent in 'Romantic lies.' Already at this preliminary, 'Romantic' stage there are symptoms of a struggle between the experiencing-I of the story and the narrating-I of the discourse that, according to James Phelan (2005, 118-119) characterizes the use of dual focalization in retrospective character narration.

But even though Richard at first aims to justify his involvement in the crimes committed by the Greek students at the behest of their master mind, Henry, he is simultaneously forced to admit his guilt to his narratee.<sup>128</sup> As his guilt is inseparable from his mimetic desire towards

<sup>127</sup> Grass, Günther. 1963 [1961]. *Katz und Maus: Eine Novelle*. Darmstadt und Neuwied: Luchterhand. In addition to the original German version, Marcus also refers to an English translation (*Cat and Mouse*) by Ralph Manheim (1964, New York: Signet Books).

<sup>128</sup> Considering the loosely detective story-like genre of *The Secret History*, it is noteworthy that there is no detective figure in the novel. There are the actual police detectives investigating Bunny's disappearance, but they are hardly cut from the same cloth as a Dupin, a Holmes, or a Poirot. Nevertheless, one could make the case that Richard – who after all is one of the *criminals* of Tartt's crime fiction – is a sort of *detective* himself when it comes to his role as the narratee to his narrator. If what Tzvetan Todorov, inspired by the equation presented by S.S. Van Dine in 1928 (cf. Todorov 1977, 48-49) said about the author paralleling the murderer and the reader

Henry, his making sense of his trauma refuses to remain mainly on the level of crafting an aesthetically pleasing narrative form but must also unmask his very proneness to such aestheticism at the expense of the ethical dimension. Therefore, far from facilitating his moral alibi, the genre of trauma narrative he at times adopts pushes Richard to confront his moral culpability and confess it to his audience.

One level of Richard's narrative, however, is still dishonest and 'Romantic' in that it strives to establish a flattering surface against which to mirror his would-be ego ideal. This initial idealization of the ego functions as an explanation and justification of the self's past actions (cf. Brooks 1992, 53-54). According to Brooks, the interdependence of the narrator and the narratee (as well as the text and its reader) is comparable to the psychoanalytic transference. The transference is tantamount to a "dilatory space" ("Zwischenreich" in Freud's own German) opening up between the analyst and the analysand where they can exchange communications. This dilatory space can resemble either a negotiation zone or a battle field. (Cf. Brooks 1992, 92; 234). The narrator-as-analysand wants to contaminate the narratee-as-analyst with his or her narrative; it is not enough that the narrative belongs to the self, it must also be embraced and accepted by the other. Richard's display of his narrative skill within the story world is symptomatic of the kind of audience adulation he desires to reproduce on the narrational level ("It was always fun to tell Francis a story. He leaned forward and hung on every word, reacting at appropriate intervals with astonishment, sympathy, dismay."; *SH*, 512). Richard's repeated lies and fabrications about his background (to Julian he tells his parents are in show business, to Bunny that his father is an oil tycoon, etc.) reveal to the narratee his overall dishonesty and send a more or less covert signal to the implied reader about his narrative reliability, or rather lack thereof. The "secret" of the novel's title, however, implies that the narratee at least will know the embarrassing truth about the narrator (although, to be precise, "The Secret History" is the title of Tartt's text, not Richard's narrative).

Right at the beginning of his narrative, Richard already gives the narratee some inclination as to his desire to sell a convincing (and, by necessity, fraudulent) autobiography to anyone who he deems a worthy audience. This admission cements a bond with the narratee with a

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paralleling the detective, is true, then one could draw a similar homology between the narrator and the narratee, making Richard the investigator of his own crime. He knows he did it in the *fabula* (or "*fable*"; Todorov 1977, 45), but his *szujet* (or "*subject*"; *ibid.*) is trying to find out why. Not surprisingly, *The Secret History* would thus fall into the genre category of the 'whydunnit' as opposed to the 'whodunnit.' Richard is like Dr Sheppard, the famously 'unreliable' narrator of Christie's *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* (1926), only in reverse: the reader knows he did it, as does the narratee (Richard himself), but neither initially knows why. At the end of the novel, the why is not unequivocally clear, but my hypothesis is that it is Richard's mimetic desire towards Henry.

promise to divulge privileged information – just as on the story level, Henry privileges Richard by making him a confidante of his own secret history, consisting in the murder of the Vermont chicken farmer. Richard's book-length confession of his involvement in Bunny's murder begins with a seemingly innocent but psychologically irreplaceable account of his own beginnings as a discontented college student (and before that, a discontented child) in a strikingly unglamorous Northern Californian town:

I grew up in Plano, a small silicon village in the north. No sisters, no brothers. My father ran a gas station and my mother stayed home until I got older and times got tighter and she went to work, answering phones in the office of one of the big chip factories outside San Jose.

Plano. The word conjures up drive-ins, tract homes, waves of heat rising from the blacktop. My years there created for me an expendable past, disposable as a plastic cup. Which I suppose was a very great gift, in a way. On leaving home I was able to fabricate a new and more satisfying history, full of striking, simplistic environmental influences; a colourful past, easily accessible to strangers. (*SH*, 5)

Richard's ready admission of his propensity to lying gently and eerily leads the narratee to expect worse as the story unravels. As the 'analysand' of his own medical report, as it were, Richard seduces his 'analyst' to engage in transference, while simultaneously feeling compelled by the mere presence of the latter to let his illusory confidence show its real cracks (and not just the dramatically necessary crack that even in its tragic quality is supposed to flatter him). The real crack of his life-narrative is the lack of being that allowed him to fill that lack with hero-worship of another being and in so doing drove him to spiritual ruin. But even this ruin is a poor consolation, because Richard is painfully aware of how it came about, and the realization leaves little room for self-flattery.

Torn as he is between his 'Romantic' temptation to paint a flattering self-portrait and his guilt over this temptation that has led him to murder (through a desire to identify with his "picturesque" and heroic model, Henry), it is no surprise that Richard's smooth discourse is at times prone to stutter. In order to save face he has to exaggerate his own unease when addressing the narratee ("This part, for some reason, is difficult for me to write [...]"; *SH*, 311).

This contagious nature of transference narrative desire would be immediately recognizable to Girard despite his mistrust of psychoanalysis in general. Like mimetic theory, Brooks's interpretation of the Freudian transference is also suspicious of 'Romantic' narratives (although the word "Romantic" is not used by Brooks in the same context as that of Girard) that strive to become whole through their replacement of metonymic movement with

metaphoric stasis (cf. Brooks 1992, 91; Chase 1987, 218). However, Brooks (like Bruffee) is more tolerant than Girard of the narrator's motives and allows him or her to establish some degree of therapeutic catharsis at the expense of a complete demystification of narrative desire.

For Brooks, a successful narrative performance, tantamount to Freud's master plot is a negotiation between metonymic movement and metaphorical stasis (Brooks 2013, 296), since the former is needed in order to achieve the latter (ibid. 295). In *The Secret History*, it is the rapid and fluttering movement of metonymies in a vain search for metaphors that prevents Richard from grasping a fixed meaning of his own story, as he is unable to master his would-be master plot: the desired self-image of an autonomous, Romantic and non-mimetic subject. Since his participation in the murder of Bunny (which is embarrassingly close to a lynching) is the most traumatic event in Richard's story, it is not surprising that it is this event that puts up the most spirited fight against metaphorically crystallized memory:

You see, then, how quick it was. And it is impossible to slow down this film, to examine individual frames. I see now what I saw then, flashing by with the swift, deceptive ease of an accident: shower of gravel, windmilling arms, a hand that claws a branch and misses. A barrage of frightened crows explodes from the underbrush, cawing and dark against the sky. Cut to Henry, stepping back from the edge. Then the film flaps up in the projector and the screen goes black. *Consummatum est.* (SH, 310; italics in the original)

Unlike in an earlier episode where Richard describes the Classics group as reminiscent of an old painting, the murder of Bunny refuses to be condensed into a single image, but is rather a chain of images, a "film" of rapidly changing "frames." Just like Bunny's dying hand "claws a branch and misses," so too is Richard unable to take hold of his past affect, the full scope of his guilt. This failure to take stock also enables him to play hide and seek with his narratee, while Tartt's implied author is left free to communicate to her novel's implied reader that this hide and seek game must come to an end in order for Richard's narrative to become truly meaningful, to function as a confession, and not as a justification.

The incidences of Richard's narrative in which the justification motive is waylaid and overcome by the confessional motive are those that compel him to admit that his transgressive actions were not deterministic after all, but, on the contrary, allowed plenty of time to back out and reconsider. Those moments in the story world are brought home to the narrator by his temporal recapture of them in the narration process, but they are not mere retrospective regrets – even though Richard immediately camouflages them as such:

It's funny, but thinking back on it now, I realize that this particular point in time, as I stood there blinking in the deserted hall, was the one point at which I might have chosen to do something very different from what I actually did. But of course I didn't see this crucial moment then for what it was; I suppose we never do. Instead, I only yawned, and shook myself from the momentary daze that had come upon me, and went on my way down the stairs. (*SH*, 223)

Even though he cynically concludes that crucial decision-making moments are recognized for the existential crossroads that they are only in retrospect, Richard nevertheless, by the sheer remembrance of the situation admits his guilt, namely the fact of his free will at the time when the decision presented itself to him and his failure to make, not so much the right choice as *any* choice. Like Don Quixote, Richard has rendered his choice-making prerogative to his own Amadis, namely Henry.

The irony inherent in Richard's quasi-elegiac narrative pursuit is that he could never eulogize Henry as a representative of a vanishing way of life (in the sense that the narrator of Proust's *The Time Recaptured* eulogizes Swann or Zeitblom in Mann's *Doctor Faustus* eulogizes Leverkühn according to Bruffee's reading of these novels), since the epoch Henry sought to escape into has long since vanished; Ancient Greece is not for the Classics majors in 1980's American colleges what the *Belle Époque* was to the French aristocracy and upper-middle class reeling from the shock of World War I, or what the Weimar era was to the German survivors of World War II. There is nothing authentic in Henry's various anachronisms and archaisms, such as his refusal to believe that moon landings have actually taken place (*SH*, 93) or his linguistic conviction that Milton's *Paradise Lost* would sound better in Latin than in English (*SH*, 90-91). Henry may believe that his eccentricities are well founded and based on an eternal truth that he thinks he has glanced during the Dionysiac revelry. However, Henry's 'ancient' identity is a product of identification and self-conditioning, not any real Romantic alienation from the world of his peers.

Of course, Richard has his own motives for believing in Henry's existential authenticity, since this belief would make his own complicity with his friend more palatable. To recognize that there is no justification for murdering Bunny, no real difference between the victim and his victimizers is what Richard is slowly and provisionally compelled to do by his narrative stocktaking.

Richard's belated recognition of his failure to refuse complicity in Bunny's murder is related to what the historian Dominick LaCapra would call a "structural trauma," a sense of lack that has its origins in personal development, not in any actual event. Richard's existential

failures to take responsibility for his own actions can be traced to his life history as perceived by himself; he has not consciously grasped the dangers of what Girard would call interdividuality but has allowed himself to succumb to “metaphysical desire,” i.e., the projection of divinity on another person in truth similar to himself.

Richard’s other cognitive failure, the failure to fully repeat the traumatic story event of Bunny’s murder in the symbolic form of narration recalls another kind of trauma, one which LaCapra would call a “historical trauma” and one that is not mere absence, but, on the contrary, an actual loss. Bunny’s falling to his death after Henry has pushed him, with Richard and the other accomplices looking on, is the historical result of Richard’s (and the others’) structural trauma.

That Richard has ruined his life is stressed by the epitaph of the novel’s *Epilogue*, which is a quotation from John Ford’s tragedy *The Broken Heart* (1633), which, although a product of the Caroline era, is set in Ancient Greece:

Alas, poor gentleman,  
He look’d not like the ruins of his youth  
But like the ruins of those ruins.

The twice-ruined “gentleman” could be interpreted through the two kinds of trauma distinguished by LaCapra. Richard’s complicity in Bunny’s murder and the devastation of its violent aftermath have left Richard in shambles, but already before that he was “ruined” by the mimetic lack in his being that caused him to get involved in these actual events in the first place.

The historical trauma further recalls Cathy Caruth’s theory of Freudian psychotraumatology as applied to literary studies. In her book, *Unclaimed Experience* (1996), Caruth refers to Freud’s reading of an excerpt in Tasso’s *Gerusalemme Liberata* in his *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, in which the hero Tancred, having accidentally killed his disguised beloved, Clorinda, slashes at a tree trunk with his sword in an enchanted forest only to see the tree bleed human blood and hear Clorinda’s voice from within it lament that Tancred has wounded her a second time (Caruth 1996, 1-2; Freud 1961, 16). For Freud, Tancred’s repetition of the killing demonstrates the patient’s tendency to repeat the trauma in unconscious actions, such as neuroses and nightmares. However, what is more important for Caruth is the fact that the repetitive action takes the form of an utterance, namely the voiced protest of Tancred’s victim, Clorinda. Tancred’s traumatic guilt is thus verbally repeated by Clorinda’s imprisoned soul, and her voice has its origins quite literally in a trauma, “trauma”



being the Greek word for “wound” (cf. Caruth 1996, 2). To put the relationship of Caruth’s “wound” and “voice” in purely narratological terms, the former would be synonymous with the story event (*fabula*) and the latter with the narrative discourse covering and reformulating it (*sjuzet*).

In *The Secret History*, there is significant symbolic emphasis placed on physical wounds of various kinds. Every member of the Classics group with the exception of their victim, Bunny, at one time or another has a wound, bruise or scar. Camilla cuts her foot on a shard of glass (*SH*, 107) and her hand on an umbrella (this latter wound is inflicted during Bunny’s funeral which makes it especially poignant from Freud’s and Caruth’s traumatological viewpoint; *SH*, 468); she also has bruises as a result of violence suffered at the hands of her jealous brother, Charles (*SH*, 546). Charles himself has bruises that have been caused by a lack of vitamins after he has allowed himself an overall physical and psychological meltdown, itself brought about by his paranoiac fear and resentment of Henry, this latter emotional attitude rendering his afflictions decidedly mimetic; Charles also has a mysterious mark that looks like an animal bite he received during the bacchanal, and it is speculated that Camilla bit him while taking the shape of a galloping deer chased for miles by all the male revellers (*SH*, 188; later, it appears the biting very probably took place during an act of incestuous sex between Camilla and Charles). Francis, riddled with anxiety, slashes his wrists (*SH*, 617), apparently trying to emulate Henry’s dramatic exit. Compared to Francis’s suicide attempt, Richard’s own cuts and bruises appear almost comically minor: he bumps his head during his dangerous winter break when he is sequestered in a run-down apartment devoid of heating and other amenities before being saved from his predicament by Henry whose desirability as a model now grows due to gratitude (*SH*, 136), and cuts himself shaving just before the mass of students discover Bunny’s disappearance (*SH*, 358-359). This latter wound signals his secret complicity in ‘bloody’ murder. Finally, Richard receives his truly serious wound when he is hit by a stray bullet during Charles’s and Henry’s wrestling for the gun which Henry then uses to shoot himself, thus overshadowing Richard’s heroic suffering and almost literally stealing his thunder with one fatal blast. Richard’s being left with a permanent scar (*SH*, 612) only continues to remind him of his traumatic guilt and servile complicity in another person’s master plot.

In the light of Henry’s heroic ascendancy on Richard’s memorial throne, it is not surprising that Henry himself has the most aesthetically appealing wound that lends him an air of mystery and tragedy. Inflicted on him by a childhood traffic accident, the wound is now a mere scar hidden underneath his hair, just above his right eye. The details of the accident are

never clarified, and Richard first hears about it from Bunny (““Got hit by a car or something and nearly died.””; *SH*, 58), who only mentions that Henry’s eye sight deteriorated as a result (““Almost lost the eye, can’t see out of it too good.””; *ibid.*). That this scar has a highly symbolic meaning pertaining to the central crime of the novel is evident from the accident having forced Henry to stay in bed for a long time, during which he took to serious reading, planting the seeds for his linguistic and literary aptitude, as well as for his intensely Hellenistic ideology. Moreover, the fact that the accident affected the sight of his one eye could very well symbolize Henry’s one-sided and flat view of the world and the people in it.

Some of these ‘wounds’ of the murder conspirators follow in the wake of Bunny’s murder, while some prefigure it. When, for example, Camilla cuts her foot early on in the narrative, the sheer drama of the event seems to anticipate something more painful, more bloody – indeed, more *traumatic* – than itself. Richard’s recollection of the event is remarkably vivid and not without an aesthetic appeal:

I was looking at the side of her face, listening to the sweet, throaty cadences of her voice, when I was jolted from my musing by a sharp exclamation. She stopped.

“What is it?”

She was staring down at the water. “Look”.

In the water, a dark plume of blood blossomed by her foot; as I blinked, a thin red tendril spiraled up and curled over her pale toes, undulating in the water like a thread of crimson smoke.

“Jesus, what did you do?”

“I don’t know. I stepped on something sharp.” (*SH*, 107)

The scene as narrated by Richard betrays, of course, his unrequited erotic passion for Camilla, but it is also important in the way it reveals the connection between sexual desire and violence (Camilla’s injured foot recalls the Crucifixion, with the shard of glass doubling for the nail<sup>129</sup>) and foreshadows Richard’s frustrated urge to “rape” and “strangle” (*SH*, 546) the woman who only has eyes for other men: Henry, because of love, and Charles, because of fear, whereas Richard inspires neither. Henry actually points towards the Crucifixion motif when he says “*Consummatus est*” after removing the piece of glass from Camilla’s foot (*SH*, 109)<sup>130</sup>; this

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<sup>129</sup> The watery wound that omits blood in a delicate visual pattern could also be an allusion to *The Great Gatsby*, an important intertext of Tarrt’s novel; in Fitzgerald’s novel, when Gatsby is shot dead by George Wilson, his blood leaves “a thin red circle” in the water of the swimming pool where he is floating just prior to his murder (*GG*, 154). The Crucifixion imagery reminiscent in this and other details of the murder scene has been pointed out by Douglas Taylor (in *F. Scott Fitzgerald: Critical Assessment*, 1991, ed. Henry Claridge, East Sussex: Helm Information, p. 216 / cit. Thomas J. Cousineau: *Ritual Unbound: Reading Sacrifice in Modernist Fiction*, 2004, Newark: University of Delaware Press).

<sup>130</sup> The shard of glass is also a kind of *katharma* (like the hardened stools of Plum which Eva removes in a similarly therapeutic and clinical manner in Morrison’s *Sula*, discussed in the previous chapter), a foreign object

phrase is borrowed by Richard as he recounts Bunny's murder – a quote that is ambiguous since it is not clear whether it is Bunny, Henry or Richard himself whose fate is being consummated.<sup>131</sup> But what is also crucial to the scene is the significance it places on voice; the interconnection of eroticism and pain is itself manifested vocally, with Camilla's "sweet, throaty cadences" being suddenly replaced by "a sharp exclamation."

As with the murder scene, Richard also feels that the wound of Camilla transcends the usual means of description. The suddenness of the experience takes nothing away from its vividness:

Sometimes, when there's been an accident and reality is too sudden and strange to comprehend, the surreal takes over. Action slows to dreamlike glide, frame by frame; the motion of a hand, a sentence spoken, fills an eternity. (*SH*, 108)

However, unlike Bunny's death, this metonymical movement is not fast-forwarded ("And it is impossible to slow down this film, to examine individual frames."), but quite to the contrary, seems to run in slow-motion. The memory actually resembles metaphor more than it does metonymy. I would argue, that this more vivid and painterly – i.e., metaphorical – memory of bloodshed works to fill in the void left by Richard's more elusive and filmic – i.e., metonymical – recollection of violence: Bunny's murder. The reason Richard has so much more difficulty with the latter is due to his active complicity in what has taken place. In LaCapra's preferred terms, Richard's memory is unable to *work through* the traumatic murder, but is still *acting it out*:

[...] to the extent that someone is possessed by the past and acting out a repetition compulsion, he or she may be incapable of ethically responsible behavior. Still, with respect to traumatic losses, acting-out may be a necessary condition of working-through, at least for victims—or, in certain ways, for all those directly involved in events. [...]. Acting-out and working-through are in general intimately linked but analytically distinguishable processes, and it may be argued that a basis of desirable practice is to create conditions in which working-through, while never fully transcending, may nonetheless counteract the force of acting-out and the repetition-compulsion in order to generate different possibilities—a different force field—in thought and life, notably empathic relations of trust not based on quasi-sacrificial processes of victimization and self-victimization. (LaCapra 2000, 191-192)

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whose physical removal stands in for the human object removed from the social body. Henry and Eva both share qualities of the healer and, not surprisingly, the murderous high priest(ess).

<sup>131</sup> Henry's somewhat perverse affinity with Christ is hinted at by his having cut the soles of his feet during the bacchanal (*SH*, 187), recalling the pierced feet of the Crucifixion. However, just like Bunny, and not Henry, truly *is* a victim of outside violence, so also in the bacchanal the true Christ figure was the figure of the chicken farmer, since his fate was tantamount to sacrifice. It is also noteworthy that Henry cannot feel the pain of his bleeding feet, suggesting that he is really not that much of a Christ figure, since he is not the one suffering.

In the context of Richard's grimly confessional narrative, LaCapra's rational, clinical terms may feel somewhat out of place; indeed, Richard seems to be beyond re-establishing "empathic relations" with either his surviving fellow characters or his narratee. LaCapra himself might also be skeptical about Tartt's character's traumatic status, since he regards the idea of "perpetrators and collaborators" sharing in their victim's victimage "dubious" and symptomatic of an all-pervasive "wound culture" (LaCapra 2000, 186). Nevertheless, Richard might just deserve a chance at making a go at any kind of redemption he can. But this means acknowledging his two disparate but interconnected traumas: the *structural* trauma of experiencing a lack in his being that drove him to a particularly unsavory form of mimetic desire complete with a complicity in taking a life and the *historical* trauma consisting in the act of taking that life. One is tempted to use theological rather than psychological language and say that what Richard strives to do is not to *recuperate* but to *repent*.<sup>132</sup>

An incident in the novel that bears the most striking resemblance to the *Gerusalemme Liberata* episode analyzed by Freud and Caruth – especially the latter's emphasis on the aspect of voice in Tasso's text – takes place (like Camilla's cutting her hand with her umbrella) during the funeral sequence. Unsurprisingly, Tartt's similar episode involves Henry, not Richard. The episode in question entails a poem recital Henry performs as a eulogy to Bunny (he is also one of Bunny's pallbearers). Henry, whom Richard in a surprisingly negative note describes as "a terrible reader" (*SH*, 466), has volunteered to recite Poem LIV of Housman's *A Shropshire Lad* ("With rue my heart is laden") for the other guests. But his "academic monotone" (*ibid.*), apparently better suited for dead languages, evokes in the guilt-ridden Richard "a brief and yet so excruciating pain, like one of those weirdly scientific Japanese tortures calibrated to extract the greatest possible misery in the smallest space of time" (*ibid.*). This pain is also experienced by Henry, as his identification with the friend he himself has murdered (Housman's poem was something of a favourite of Bunny's and it is his voice that Richard remembers when listening to Henry) borders on masochism and implies a Nietzschean determination of the aristocratic Superman not to shrink

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<sup>132</sup> LaCapra himself states, that while "[e]veryone is subject to structural trauma," "[...] with respect to historical trauma and its 'representation,' the distinction among victims, perpetrators, and by-standers is crucial. 'Victim' is not a psychological category. It is, in variable ways, a social, political, and ethical category. [...] not everyone traumatized by events is a victim. There is the possibility of perpetrator trauma, which must be acknowledged and in some sense worked through if perpetrators are to distance themselves from an earlier implication in deadly ideologies and practices" (LaCapra 2000, 196).

Richard is exactly this kind of perpetrator 'victim,' and his "working through" his mimetic desire towards Henry's persona with its attendant "deadly ideologies and practices" is the core of his trauma narrative.

away from the unpleasant consequences of transgressing slave morality. The fusion of Henry's and Bunny's voices in Richard's mind, however, counteracts this Superman aspiration, as it demonstrates the doubling of the murderer and his victim and underlines their sameness. This affinity between the murderer and the victim becomes chrystallized when Henry, upon witnessing two ambulance attendants carrying Bunny's freshly discovered body on a stretcher, falls back in his chair with eyes closed and a sharp release of breath "as if he'd been shot" (*SH*, 415).

Richard's resistance to remembering his full guilt (as well as the mimetic desire it stemmed from) resembles Caruth's description of how victims of "accidents" have difficulty figuring out exactly what happened to them:

[...] the recurring image of the accident in Freud, as the illustration of the unexpected or the accidental, seems to be especially compelling, and indeed becomes the exemplary scene for trauma *par excellence*, not only because it depicts what we can know about traumatizing events, but also, and more profoundly, because it tells of what it is, in traumatic events, that is *not* grasped. The accident, that is, as it emerges in Freud and is passed on through other trauma narratives, does not simply represent the violence of a collision but also conveys the impact of its incomprehensibility. What returns to haunt the victim, these stories tell us, is not only the reality of the violent event but also the reality of the way that its violence has not yet been fully known. (Caruth 1996, 6; italics in the original)

The irony in Richard's case, of course, is that while Camilla's cutting herself indeed was accidental, the group's ganging up on Bunny certainly was not. However, with regard to the latter event, a trauma proper, Richard is not able to remain oblivious to his massive guilt as he is assailed by the knowledge of his transgression when during Bunny's funeral he for the first time meets his victim's father and witnesses the older man's outburst of grief first-hand:

He was still crying. His face was purple. When I reached down to loosen his collar he grabbed me by the wrist. 'Gone,' he wailed, looking me straight in the eye. '*My baby.*'

His gaze – helpless, wild – hit me like a blackjack. Suddenly, and for the first time, really, I was struck by the bitter, irrevocable truth of it; the evil of what we had done. It was like running full speed into a brick wall. I let go his collar, feeling completely helpless. I wanted to die. 'Oh, God,' I mumbled, 'God help me, I'm sorry –'

I felt a fierce kick in my anklebone. It was Francis. His face was as white as chalk. (*SH*, 437)

The suddenness with which the retrospective knowledge of Bunny's murder dawns on Richard brings to mind Caruth's view of trauma – borrowed from Lacan – as not only

something that lays dormant in the victim's psyche, but also as a kind of rude awakening: "*Awakening*, in Lacan's reading of the dream, *is itself the site of trauma*, the trauma of the necessity and impossibility of responding to another's death" (Caruth 1996, 100; italics in the original). The dream analysis conducted by first Freud and then Lacan and recounted by Caruth is about a father who, immediately following the death of his child of fever, has a nightmare in which the child, now alive, asks him: "Father, don't you see that I'm burning?"; upon waking up, the father notices that an old man who was left to watch over the body has fallen asleep and allowed a candle to collapse into the child's deathbed, threatening the body with a real burning:

[...] if Freud reads in the dream of the burning child the story of a sleeping consciousness figured by a father unable to face the accidental death of his child, Lacan, for his part, reads in the awakening the story of the way father *and* child are inextricably bound together through the story of a trauma. (Caruth 1996, 102; italics in the original)

The scene with Bunny's father resembles the dream about the burning child in that the already dead body of (Bunny) comes to life, not in a dream, but with an uncanny double (Bunny's father who bears a strong physical resemblance to all of his sons).

But there is also a further dimension to Richard's traumatic awakening that bears to our mimetic concern of trauma, namely the way in which Richard *shares* his trauma with his accomplices – just as, in Caruth's dream example, the father shares his guilt with the old man who falls asleep while supposedly engaged in vigil. Not only does Richard realize "for the first time" the "evil" "truth" of his crime, but he is almost simultaneously brought to face his *partnership* in crime: he quite literally gets kicked in the leg by it, as Francis reminds him he is not alone in the conspiracy but that the confession he is only seconds away from articulating would have consequences for his friends as well.

It is Francis who also later serves Richard as a reminder of complicity and its relationship to time. After an irritable argument with his friend, Richard realizes that Bunny's murder has not only cemented his and the Greek group's past together, but more fatally, their future as well:

Without warning I had a vision of Francis – twenty years later, fifty years, in a wheelchair. And of myself – older, too, sitting around with him in some smoky room, the two of us repeating this exchange for the thousandth time. At one time I had liked the idea, that the act, at least had bound us together; we were not ordinary friends, but friends till-death-do-us-part. This thought had been my only comfort in

the aftermath of Bunny's death. Now it made me sick, knowing there was no way out. I was stuck with them, with all of them, for good. (*SH*, 519)

Complicity in a supposedly individualist crime reminds Richard painfully of the contagious nature of mimetic desire. As Girard puts it in his reading of Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*: "'Affection' is inseparable from 'infection' [...]" (Girard 2004, 312).

The sense of complicity does not leave Richard even after he has distanced himself from the Greek group after Henry's death. In his self-loathing confessional antics, Richard even goes as far as to flaunt his callousness to the narratee by making a comparison between his own and an infamous serial killer's embarrassing selectiveness of memory:

I am sorry, as well, to present such a sketchy and disappointing exegesis of what is in fact the central part of my story. I have noticed that even the most garrulous and shameless of murderers are shy about recounting their crimes. A few months ago, in an airport bookstore, I picked up the autobiography of a notorious thrill killer and was disheartened to find it entirely bereft of lurid detail. At the points of greatest suspense (rainy night; deserted street; fingers closing around the lovely neck of Victim Number Four) it would suddenly, and not without some coyness, switch to some entirely unrelated matter. (Was the reader aware that an IQ test had been given him in prison? That his score had been gauged as being close to that of Jonas Salk?) By far the major portion of the book was devoted to spinsterish discourses on prison life – bad food, hijinks in the exercise yard, tedious little jailbird hobbies. It was a waste of five dollars. (*SH*, 311-312)

Typical of Bruffee's elegiac romance mode with which Tartt's novel does not otherwise fully comply, the narrator "[...] finds fault with himself over his evident inability to tell the tale adequately, or at least coherently. He needlessly apologizes for his limitations" (Bruffee 1983, 186). But Richard's narrative evasions are even more mimetic and doubled than a mere match of "rhetorical judo" (cf. Bruffee 1983, 109) with the narratee would suggest. In addition with the double relationship between Richard the narrator and Richard the narratee, there is doubling between Richard and his hero, Henry, occurring both in the story world and on the level of narration where it is symbolically re-enacted and thematically worked through; and there is an additional doubling, a brief and anecdotal one but still important, namely, between Richard and the serial-killer confessor. As a sort of metonymy for Henry, Richard uses this other murderous confessor and confessing murderer as a screen upon which to reflect his own complicity with Henry who failed to do any substantial confessing of his own and therefore botched Richard's own confessional project before it had a chance to begin. Richard even goes as far as to call the habitual murderer his "colleague" (*SH*, 312) and apologizes on the behalf of them both for having disappointed their respective readerships through the

frustration of audience voyeurism. Although the serial killer divulges a very *public* history of his murderous exploits, whereas Richard's narrative is a *secret* one, they are both of them prone to the same kind of evasive mannerisms and "exege[ti]c" gaps.<sup>133</sup> Nevertheless, by allowing the narratee awareness of his "sketch[iness]," Richard willfully betrays his guilt and thus approaches Girard's novelistic truth at the expense of a mere therapeutic catharsis favored by the Freudian critics.

This said, however, the mere fact of confessional discourse is not proof of a 'novelistic' conclusion triumphing over a 'Romantic' one. In his study of confessional narratives (whether legal, religious or literary), Brooks rightly states that "[...] Western culture, most strikingly since the *Romantic* era to our day, has made confessional speech a prime mark of authenticity, par excellence the kind of speech in which the individual authenticates his inner truth" (Brooks 2000, 4; my italics). And although Girard does not equate the Romantic era with what he means by the 'Romantic lie,' it is obvious that from his 'interdividual' viewpoint, the authentication of an individual's inner truth does not quite meet the criteria of repudiating the fallacy of a subject's discrete and fully autonomous self. Indeed, the quintessential Romantic confessor, Rousseau, is also a Romantic in a less flattering sense of the word, since his egocentric *Confessions* refuse to acknowledge any models and thus obviously clash with Augustine's theocentric *Confessions* (Fleming & O'Carroll 2013). Whatever the differences between the Augustinian and the Rousseauan confessional tradition,<sup>134</sup> however, they are both about the confessor's self – indeed, how could they be anything else, seeing that the confession as a genre requires a protagonist who, according to the psychologist Mark Freeman, "finds himself or herself *important* enough to write about" (Freeman 1993, 26-27; italics in the original).<sup>135</sup> Nevertheless, Brooks stresses that the modern confession narrative is

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<sup>133</sup> Bruffee stresses the tendency of elegiac romance narrators to self-reflexively point out the failings of their narrative powers, for example in Mann's *Doctor Faustus* (*Doktor Faustus*), the narrator Serenus Zeitblom laments "the absence of a controlled and regular structure in my work" (*Doctor Faustus*, Chapter 21 /cit. Bruffee 1983, 51; footnote 34).

<sup>134</sup> In *Troubling Confessions* (2000), Brooks also distinguishes Augustinian serenity from Rousseauan anxiety: "Unlike Saint Augustine, who can stabilize his confessions in the discovery of revealed truth, Rousseau cannot come to rest in the speech-act that begins 'I confess'" (Brooks 2000, 52).

<sup>135</sup> In his book, *Rewriting the Self* (1993), Freeman compares Augustine's confessional ethos with the subsequent modern tradition that is decidedly more individualist: "Whereas in [Augustine's] case it is none other than God who is ultimately responsible both for bringing individuality into being and for determining its specific shape, in our own case the responsibility is most often seen to devolve upon ourselves, the self who we become emerging in significant part as a function of the irrevocably individualized life projects we set before us. [...] although Augustine's *Confessions* surely marks an important turn in the meaning of selfhood, one that is very much concerned with *historicizing* human reality — with seeing the recounting of one's life as an appropriate and necessary vehicle for the development of self-understanding — it remains a far cry from our present-day conception, with its profound emphasis on self-determination, 'individuality,' and so on" (Freeman 1993, 26; italics in the original).



more self-obsessed – or rather other-obsessed – than its antecedent, and that this change was already apparent in such eighteenth- and nineteenth-century narrator-confessors as Rousseau's autobiographical alter ego and Dostoevsky's Underground Man who become their narratees' doubles:

The transferential bond between analysand and analyst is crucial [...], I think, [in] all confessional situations. In fact a bond comes into being even when the confessor is a simple tape recorder, and even when confessor and confessant are the same person (as with Rousseau and the Underground Man), since in the performance of confession they become double. (Brooks 2000, 53)

True to this motif of doubled confession in which the doubling may be difficult to admit, Richard begins his narrative with the disclaimer that the story he is about to tell will be “about me” – a statement that is hardly true, since his discourse dwells at length on the story he shares with others, especially his hero / mediator, Henry. Richard's comparing his narrative with the serial killer's autobiography may very well be motivated by something else than mere flippancy; it may be a perverse but logical claim for autonomy, since what partly drew Richard to Henry was the latter's transgressive Nietzscheanism.

But there is another, even more humble and in a sense even more truly ‘Augustinian’ way to look at the serial killer episode of Richard's self-contemplation, and that is his willingness to admit that there is nothing spectacular – i.e., Satanic, Promethean – after all about his murderous transgression. The comparison between himself and the serial killer not only points out that Richard resembles the serial killer, but also that the serial killer resembles Richard. So even if both are equally glamorous (Richard may not be a *serial* killer, but he is all the same a killer), they are simultaneously equally prosaic figures (both turn their lofty confessions into idle chatter and share each other's interest in the most mundane of topics). Public or clandestine, their histories share the same secret, namely their lack of spectacular singularity.

In *Amsterdam*, the narrative structure pertaining to the aspect of time is radically different from that in place in *The Secret History*. Unlike *The Secret History* and *What I Loved*, which resemble memoirs and diaries, the narrator of *Amsterdam* is heterodiegetic, and there is no

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Although Freeman is right in pointing out the modern trend of individualized responsibility and culpability involved in the secularized forms of confessions (autobiographies, memoirs, etc.), the fact of this individual “self-determination” is highly debatable. Although no doubt lamenting what he calls deviated transcendence, Girard would nevertheless stress human responsibility and (relative) freedom of choices. More importantly, however, he would emphasize that these choices are determined by ‘interindividual’ rather than individual factors, although this kind of dependence on the human Other is much more difficult to admit today than it was during Augustine's day when idolatry was openly warned against, while mentorship and *imitatio Christi* were explicitly encouraged and needed no repressing.

character jotting down his or her reminiscences of another era. Also, unlike in the equally ‘omniscient’ narrative structure of *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, McEwan’s novel lacks the reliance on prolepses, with the plot itself moving in a chronological fashion and the characters’ flashbacks – there are no flashforwards – remaining mere short anecdotes. The chapters are sometimes presented in non-chronological order, flashing back in Clive’s mind, say, to a conversation he had the day before. However, the movement in time is not as staccato-like as in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, or as epically ruminative as in *The Secret History* and *What I Loved*; neither does *Amsterdam* chronicle time in historical succession as does *Sula* which has chapters named after years (beginning in 1919 and ending in 1965). Nevertheless, time, memory and trauma play significant roles in McEwan’s novel as well. Furthermore, as in the other novels, these temporal aspects are related to a relationship between two persons, one-time friends whose very friendship is what effects their conception of time, be it in the form of duration or rupture.

The most significant feature of the mimeticism at play in *Amsterdam* is the rigorous symmetry and extreme reciprocity demonstrated by the interaction of the two main characters. The unremitting equivalence between the enemy ‘brothers’ is showcased in the textual structure of the novel, in that very often a chapter focusing on and focalized by Clive is immediately followed by one centering on Vernon. Through much of the action, the two men are separated by space, and there is not as much direct dialogue between McEwan’s protagonists as is customary in, say, Dostoevsky’s dramatic meetings that highlight the violent doubling of *his* characters. On the contrary, McEwan’s narrative shuffles Clive and Vernon back and forth in a manner recalling the novel’s epitaph, taken from Auden’s poem “The Crossroads” (“The friends who met here and embraced are gone, Each to his own mistake;”). When they are together, they argue or connive; when they are apart, they are equally preoccupied with one another. This mutual preoccupation is what renders the aspects of time and memory important to the novel, even though the actual plot moves on the level of the present.

There are two seemingly separate, but ultimately converging ‘relationship histories.’ The first is related to an object, namely Molly who is no longer alive but who plays a fundamental role in Clive’s and Vernon’s respective pasts. As long as Molly remains in sight *as Molly*, there is peace between her two former lovers who are also best friends; the moment Molly’s actual personality loses its presence and becomes a symbol rather than a human being, she is turned into an object of contention in a tug of war between Clive and Vernon. This tug of war

is the second ‘relationship history,’ and in Girard’s terms, it is a relationship between rivals, not between a subject and an object.

Molly never truly disappears from the memory of Clive and Vernon, and the men continue to plead to her legacy when fighting with each other. However, her figure acquires hauntingly phantasmagorical overtones, such as when Clive observes a resemblance between Molly and the Lake District hiker whom he fails to save from an attempted rape. The haunting becomes quite literal, when the rogue nurse assisting the euthanasia doctor appears both as a double for Molly and the hiker. Furthermore, as the doctor takes on the appearances of Clive and Vernon’s male rivals, Paul Lanark and Frank Dibben, respectively, Molly becomes an augury of rivalry, not an ‘object’ of love, lust, or respect. Time, among other things, marks this transition in the context of rapidly escalating mimetic conflict.

“Recapturing the past is to welcome a truth which most men spend their lives trying to escape, to recognize that one has always copied Others in order to seem original in their eyes and in one’s own,” writes Girard and thereby synthesizes the two seemingly disparate phenomena: time and the modeling of desire (Girard 1976, 38). This important recognition, however, escapes the two protagonists of *Amsterdam*; though dwelling in the past – both the recent and the more distant one – Clive and Vernon fail to acknowledge both the self’s lack of singular superiority and the Other’s lack of singular inferiority. At the moment of their deaths, they remain locked in their Manichean dualisms. But by showing the implied reader this ‘Romantic lie’ permeating the characters and leading to their doom, the implied author points to a ‘novelistic truth’ to be discovered outside the narrative universe but nevertheless inscribed in the text.

### 6.3 The Novel as Gospel versus the Novel as Elegy

The interconnections between time, narrative, and identity have been amply explored. Paul Ricoeur has stated that personal identity can only be articulated in the temporal dimension of human existence (Ricoeur 1992, 114). In *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative* (2008), H. Porter Abbott cites the understanding of time as the one essential feature of all narratives:

Whatever the final word may be regarding the source of this gift for narrative – whether from nature or from nurture or from some complex combination of the two – the question remains: what does narrative do for us? And the first answer is that it does many things for us [...]. But if we had to choose one answer above all others, the likeliest is that *narrative is the principal way in which our species organizes its*

*understanding of time*. This would seem to be the fundamental gift of narrative with the greatest range of benefits. (Abbott 2008, 3; italics in the original)

However, the narrative and temporal implications of the self-other relationship have not received considerable attention from narratologists or other literary analysts. Girard's goal of unearthing the 'novelistic truth' provides a poignant edge to narrative conception of time by linking it with the interaction between narrated selves and others. As was suggested in the previous subchapter, the self's relationship with his or her other(s) is a privileged catalyst for both remembering and repressing past events to the extent that these events become inseparable from the people who acted as their catalysts. In the process of reminiscence which is the narrative discourse, the events of the story told become one with the characters of that story.

Time and mimesis are therefore inextricably linked. The historicity of individual (or, rather, 'interindividual') mimesis is pointed out by Oughourlian in his interview with Girard: "Memory is indeed a gigantic machine for repeating itself in time and ought to provide a whole range of illustrations for mimesis" (Oughourlian / cit. Girard 1987, 324). Unfortunately, neither Oughourlian nor Girard elaborate on the specifically narrative aspects of this connection. Girard does, however, imply as much in his discussion of one author in particular, namely Proust.

It is not by chance that while recuperating from his gun wound (as well as from a more intangible wound caused by Henry's death and its attendant 'mimetic' hangover) Richard spends his spare time reading Proust of all writers (*SH*, 612). Proust is, after all, the quintessential 'novelist of time.' According to Girard, he is also one of the most important novelists of mimetic desire. Indeed, in *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, Girard singles out Proust's novelistic project (along with that of Dostoevsky, especially) as a great arbiter of resentment and conflict arising from mimetic desire in that he achieves a spiritual reconciliation between the self and the Other. This reconciliation takes place with time, and, more importantly, in time. Proust is also an elegant observer of "self-interested forgetfulness" (Girard 1976, 37) – or what psychologists like the already quoted Willem A. Wagenaar would call "self-serving memory." For Wagenaar, the tendency to forget the more unsavory facts of one's past works to consolidate the conceptual self as opposed to (among other selves) the interpersonal self (Wagenaar 1994, 192). Of course, the very interpersonality of the self is of great interest to mimetic theory and is in evidence when Girard analyzes the famous 'Berma' episode of *Du côté de chez Swann* that deals with the young narrator's initial disappointment

with the actress's performance that is soon transfigured by the recognition of the others' interest in the object almost discarded by the self:

The agonizing conflict between personal experience and the testimony of others is resolved in favor of the others. But choosing the Other in such cases is only a particular way of choosing oneself. It is to choose again the old self whose competence and taste will not be questioned, thanks to M. de Norpois and the journalist in *Le Figaro*. It is to believe in oneself thanks to the Other. The operation would not be possible without an almost instantaneous forgetting of the genuine impression. This self-interested forgetfulness lasts until *The Past Recaptured*, a veritable river of *living memory*, a veritable resurrection of truth, which makes it possible to write the episode about Berma. (Girard 1976, 37; italics in the original)

In comparing Wagenaar's cognitivist approach to Girard's interindividual psychology, one would be tempted to speculate that a "self-interested forgetfulness" showcased by Proust's 'Marcel' is an instance of a fast update, which is then supplanted by a slow update in *The Past Recaptured*. If such a parallel can indeed be drawn from such different academic paradigms – cognitive psychology and philosophical anthropology, respectively – then one could also claim that mimetic conflicts often derive from fast updating and that to 'convert' to a 'vertical transcendence' would require a slow updating process, one that coincides with the repudiation of 'deviated transcendence.' "Memory is the guardian of the temple, because it makes possible forgetfulness!" writes Oughourlian (2010, 99). To rejuvenate one's self-serving, negatively mimetic memory through a conversion would therefore signal "a veritable river of *living memory*" (Girard 1976, 37; italics in the original) that would consequentially raze "the temple" as a sanctuary of idolatry.<sup>136</sup>

Proust's 'Marcel' mainly battles with his own memories and revisions thereof; it was he who had a romanticized relationship with his others, and the reader is left to witness his, the narrator's, Romantic lies and their subsequent transformations into novelistic truths. This confessional mode is present in Hustvedt's and Tartt's 'I-novels,' but also in Spark's and

<sup>136</sup> Oughourlian, more clinically oriented than Girard, further distinguishes between forgetfulness and denial and attributes the latter to a heightened degree of mimetic desire: "Misunderstanding by the subject of the otherness of 'his' or 'her' desire and of its mimetic nature is the same thing as claiming ownership of it and claiming the anteriority of one's own desire in relation to that of the other. Such misunderstanding amounts to a *denial* rather than merely forgetfulness, and it turns the model into a rival or an obstacle. When this happens, any remembering of the otherness of his or her 'own' desire will produce suffering in the subject and pathological symptoms. (Oughourlian 2010, 108; italics in the original).

Although it makes perfect sense to describe the various degrees of intensity and stages of pathology in the context of Oughourlian's own disciplines of psychiatry and psychotherapy, and although these degrees and stages do play a role in my fictional examples (with the relationship between Giles and Mark in Hustvedt's *What I Loved*, for instance, being more 'pathological' than that between, say Miss Brodie and Sandy in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*), I will not delve into these clinical spheres very deeply, keeping in mind (in the context of my non-medical discipline, at least) Girard's warning in *Things Hidden* against structuralist and psychoanalytic tendency to compartmentalize.

Morrison's third-person narrative texts that deal with the theme of time passing. Although in *Sula*, the reader learns of Sula's conversion on her deathbed and knows that Sula has forgiven Nel even though Nel at this point does not ask to be forgiven, it is Nel's 'novelistic' development that is more crucial in the long run and finally reaches its conversional pivot in the end of the novel; similarly, the conversional burden of *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* is laid on Sandy's doorstep, since, unlike Sula in Morrison's novel, the eponym of Spark's novel has missed her conversion in death. However, there is a slightly different mnemonic conflict with otherness at play in addition to the one existing within the self, and that is a case of two conflicting selves that each has a different memory of the past. This conflict is most apparent in McEwan's *Amsterdam* (although *Sula* comes very close), in which Clive and Vernon each blame the other for having seriously neglected the duties and wasted the resources of their friendship.

Cases where two people have conflicting memories of past events abound in experimental psychology where they can be attributed to strokes or head injury, but nevertheless affect human interactions, since "information that appears to question our perception of ourselves can appear to be particularly threatening" and "[e]rrors in self-perception can be very socially disruptive" (Baddeley 1994, 240-241). In *Amsterdam*, Clive hails himself as a "genius" precisely because, after his feud with Vernon, he is even less sure of his symphony's reception in the music world. Vernon meanwhile makes excuses for his witch-hunt by claiming that he at least is not socially aloof like Clive is. The irony in *Amsterdam* is, of course, that whereas the fatal disruption is brought about through medical means, the motives for the feud itself are anything but medical. That both men think the other has gone mad is mere subterfuge covering up the fact of their mimetic envy. Furthermore, the fact that both Clive and Vernon experience physical symptoms that make them suspect they are suffering from a fatal illness is no more than a mimetic reaction to Molly's death, namely a desire to be spared a similar humiliation that overcame her.

To sum up the narrator's (or the focalizing main character's) attitudes in relation to his or her hero in the novels just studied, we can conclude the following patterns: In *What I Loved*, Leo wholly approves of Bill's moral sensibilities as they are manifested in his artworks (and very often, in his person as well), whereas in *The Secret History*, Richard, though identifying with Henry in a manner resembling the relationship between Zeitblom and Leverkühn as

analyzed by Bruffee (1983, 158-172),<sup>137</sup> is much more facetious; in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, Sandy explicitly disapproves of Miss Brodie's fascist sympathies and sexual hypocrisy, but this only goes to show how deeply fascinated by her she truly is; in *Amsterdam*, Clive and Vernon compete over the degree of integrity the sanctioning source of which is supposedly the already deceased Molly, so that the competition becomes an end in itself and thus drained of all content. Of the five novels, *Amsterdam* thus falls farthest behind of what could be called a successful 'elegy,' since what the narrative lays to rest is the very possibility of reconciliation between the two friends. What the text echoes instead – at least on the level of story world events – is a 'false gospel' that sings the praises of deviated transcendence and never-ending, deadly rivalry overseen by the worldly princes like George Lane. This idolatrous gospel sounds a kind of deranged "Ode to Joy."

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<sup>137</sup> Bruffee writes that Zeitblom admires Leverkühn for his immoralism and arrogance, but is unable to recognize these "abject" qualities as the very reasons for wanting to keep close to his friend, and these qualities are also part of Zeitblom's own idealized self as reflected in Leverkühn (Bruffee 1983, 164-165).

## 7 End of Story: From Horizontal Rivalry to Vertical Transcendence

Whereas for Bruffee, “striving to live without heroes” (Bruffee 1983, 57) is a quintessentially twentieth-century and anti-Romantic tendency in fiction – itself symptomatic of cultural history at large –, for Girard this pursuit is the other side of the same Romantic fallacy, since to live without mimetic models is not only undesirable, but also virtually impossible. Girard therefore emphasizes the importance of recognizing the fact of mimetic desire and repudiating it only insofar as it is rivalrous and idolatrous. Instead of giving up models, Girard would advocate replacing bad models with good ones. ‘Good’ models would be those mediators of desire who do not respond to imitation by entangling the imitator into a double bind. In this sense the best models are those who either embody the ‘vertical’ transcendence outside and above immanent human conflicts (such as Christ), or those who at least direct the immanent imitation towards a vertical point (models who are *Christ-like*).<sup>138</sup>

This next chapter explores the outcomes of mimetic desire between characters in the fictional universes of the novels analyzed so far. In it I will summarize the varying ‘degrees’ of the character conversions – or, as is the case with McEwan’s *Amsterdam*, a complete lack thereof – in either the story worlds or the narrators’ levels in the five novels studied. I will furthermore analyze the conversion taking place – or rather, recommended – on the level of the implied author of these texts. In this latter case, even *Amsterdam* is a valid candidate for the conversion in the sense of the word meant by mimetic theory, although Girard’s own readings have always stayed on the levels of the story world or the narration.

Although Sandy Stranger in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* does embrace the Catholic Church and a life of external Christianity (unlike, as we will see later, Richard Papen in *The Secret History*), the ending of Spark’s novel is similarly ambiguous to that of Tartt. “‘There was a Miss Jean Brodie in her prime’” (*PMJB*, 128) is Sandy’s confession-like phrase that brings the third-person narrative to a close. Has Sandy been freed from negative mimetic desire or not? The fact that she confesses to having imitated Miss Brodie could be interpreted as an enlightened recognition of the repressed Other. On the other hand, the words could also

<sup>138</sup> As Robert Doran points out, “The ‘novelistic’ conclusion, then, is the one in which the unmasking of desire leads to an effective renunciation of the world, a negation of deviated transcendence (negating the divination of the human Other), thereby providing an opening to an authentic concept of divinity” (Doran 2014, 171). So even though Bruffee’s ‘elegiac’ concept deals with a similar renunciation of an idolized human Other, Girard’s ‘novelistic’ formulation goes considerably further in insisting a break with ‘the world.’ Not surprisingly, then, Girard is in effect more ‘Christian’ than Bruffee, although, as Doran reminds us, his Christianity is not tantamount to becoming an active church member or even a believer (Doran 2014, 172). Doran actually finds surprising similarities between the Christian Girard and the atheist Sartre, since both thinkers strive to transcend the idolatry of the human Other (Doran 2014, 177). I would venture to claim that Bruffee, on the other hand, is still too (traditionally) psychological and ‘therapeutic’ to fully endorse what Doran calls Girard’s *via negativa*.



imply that the memory of the already dead teacher is still haunting her. We learn that she is unhappy at the convent and resented by the other nuns for her worldly success:

She clutched the bars of the grille as if she wanted to escape from the dim parlour beyond, for she was not composed like the other nuns who sat, when they received their rare visitors, well back in the darkness with folded hands. But Sandy always leaned forward and peered, clutching the bars with both hands, and the other sisters remarked that Sister Helena had too much to bear from the world since she had published her psychological book which was so unexpectedly famed. (*PMJB*, 35)

Sandy now enjoys the same kind of authority as Miss Brodie did in her school in relation to other teachers – and also has the same kind of enemies, namely, her colleagues. Also, the kind of religious coquetry she displays to her visitors at the convent resembles Girard's definition of the 'Romantic lie' with its paradoxes of hermit-like solitude and social gregariousness co-existing. By "clutching the bars of the grille," Sandy anticipates the kind of picturesque and exotic posturing that her visitors expect from her, thus bowing before the collective ethos of mimetic prestige-seeking – both inside and outside her monastic haven: "[...] everyone likes to visit a nun, it provides a spiritual sensation, a catharsis to go home with, especially if the nun clutches the bars of the grille" (*PMJB*, 121). It is obvious, that as far as genuine spiritual rebirth is what constitutes a conversion, Sandy has yet to experience it. However, with the emphatic articulation of Miss Brodie's influence on her, she might be headed in the right direction.

Of the five novels, Morrison's *Sula* is the only one that has its main character convert fully in the story world. Nel's novelistic conversion in the end of *Sula* has already been noted, and despite the title of the novel, the real protagonist of the novel is as much her as it is the eponym – if not more so. However, to stress the character hierarchy of Morrison's text too much would be to undermine its essentially dyadic dynamic. Nel's concluding plaint ("girl, girl, girlgirlgirl"; *S*, 174) is initiated by her recognition that she and Sula "was girls together," with the grammatically incorrect singular verb ("was" as opposed to "were") signalling a fundamental truth of togetherness – and not symbiotic unity or binary separation.

With this togetherness in mind, it is not surprising that Sula experiences a similar conversion to Nel's earlier on in the narrative. Sula's conversion is precipitated by Nel's hostile and gloating visit on her bedside when she is dying of an unspecified illness that strikes her after she is rejected by Ajax, the one man she genuinely grows to love, and is therefore all the more poignant in its unreciprocated renunciation of rivalry on Sula's part. Just as Nel eventually comes to realize that it is not her runaway husband Jude, but her best

friend Sula she misses during all the years in between the end of her marriage and her eye-opening visit to Eva's nursing home (ibid.), Sula's deathbed conversion singles out Nel, not Ajax, as the most important person in her life<sup>139</sup>:

While in this state of weary anticipation, she noticed that she was not breathing, that her heart had stopped completely. A crease of fear touched her breast, for any second there was sure to be a violent explosion in her brain, a gasping of breath. Then she realized, or rather she sensed, that there was not going to be any pain. She was not breathing because she didn't have to. Her body did not need oxygen. She was dead.

Sula felt her face smiling. "Well, I'll be damned," she thought, "it didn't even hurt. Wait'll I tell Nel." (S, 149)

Whether Sula's self-consciousness at the moment of and beyond her death is a supernatural instance linking Morrison's novel to the genre of magical realism, or whether Sula is merely phantasmagorically anticipating her impending demise, is not important in itself. What is essential is her unexpected cheerfulness in letting go of the world – the Biblical 'this-worldliness' of it, at least. It is not a case of suicide; Sula does not want to die. Rather, it is a case of finding life in the inevitable death – the famous grain of wheat from John's Gospel that has inspired Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* (cf. also Girard 1976, 311) – and contrasting this find with a recognition of death-in-life, namely the sacrificial and conflictual underpinnings of human culture. Sula, having in the latter part of her life immersed herself in rivalry and resentment while battling the sacrificial and archaic status quo of the Bottom collectively and Nel individually, now rediscovers her common humanity with her former friend in death.

Whereas Nel's conversion takes place while she is physically alive but spiritually dead, Sula's conversion takes place when she is – or is about to be – physically dead.<sup>140</sup> Whether a spiritual afterlife awaits either of the women or not is immaterial to the point Morrison's

<sup>139</sup> Sula's prioritization of Nel over Ajax is not explicitly articulated by her or the narrator in the manner Nel puts her own preference of Sula over Jude into words ("All that time, all that time, I thought I was missing Jude."; S, 174). If anything, Sula's love for Ajax is implied to run deeper than does Nel's for Jude, since her fatal disease is linked to his leaving her. Still, the fact that it is Nel and no one else who is summoned by Sula at the moment of her death strikes a parallel with Nel's more explicit invocation of Sula in the ending climax of the novel.

<sup>140</sup> The occurrence of two conversions in *Sula* departs from the character dynamic described by Bruffee who states that in elegiac romance fiction the narrator changes, but the hero, apart from his physical death, does not (Bruffee 1983, 40). Not only are there two converting characters in *Sula*, but in this novel the character more closely resembling Bruffee's "hero" (Sula) converts first and serves as a direct influence on the "squire" character (Nel); unlike in typical elegiac romances, in *Sula*, the squire does not realize her enlightenment at the "hero's" expense, but in belated synchrony with her. Bruffee's criterium is more clearly realized, at least provisionally, in *The Secret History* and *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, whereas in *Amsterdam* there is full symmetry between two characters from start to finish with neither Vernon nor Clive positioned as a hero or a squire; in *What I Loved*, on the other hand, the fullness of the elegiac genre is marred by Bill's essential decency and the relatively few improvements that Leo could hope to make in his life that would somehow underline Bill's failures – though Bill does experience these failures to some extent.

implied author is making through her characters' parallel developments: both Sula's and Nel's changes of heart are life-affirming and counter the logic of death they have hitherto bowed down to – Nel sacrificially, Sula conflictually.

Relating Morrison's conversions to the ones studied by Girard in *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, it could be said that Nel is reminiscent of Raskolnikov in Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*,<sup>141</sup> whereas Sula is more akin to Julien Sorel of Stendhal's *The Red and the Black*. Raskolnikov begins his new life in this world, which has been transfigured by his renunciation of mimetic rivalry. Julien Sorel, on the other hand, resigns himself to death which enables him to see through the envy and ambition that have plagued him in his lifeless life<sup>142</sup>:

One sentence with a double meaning in *The Red and the Black* expresses beautifully the link between death and liberation, between the guillotine and the break with the mediator: "What do *Others* matter to me," exclaims Julien Sorel, "my relations with others are going to be abruptly cut off" (Girard 1976, 294; italics in the original).

In *Sula*, there is a similar insight concerning solitude on the brink of death that is liberating despite its grimness:

If she turned her head, she would not be able to see the boarded-up window Eva jumped out of. And looking at those four wooden planks with the steel rod slanting across them was the only peace she had. The sealed window soothed her with its sturdy termination, its unassailable finality. It was as though for the first time she was completely alone—where she had always wanted to be—free of the possibility of distraction. It would be here, only here, held by this blind window high above the elm tree, that she might draw her legs up to her chest, close her eyes, put her thumb in her mouth and float over and down the tunnels, just missing the dark walls, down, down, down until she met a rain scent and would know the water was near, and she

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<sup>141</sup> In chapter 2.3., I have drawn a comparison between the confrontations between Raskolnikov and Porfiry Petrovich and Nel and Eva, respectively.

<sup>142</sup> Another example by Girard demonstrating the same kind of spiritual rebirth taking place either in this world or beyond is taken from Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* in addition to *Crime and Punishment*: "Raskolnikov and Dmitri Karamazov do not die a physical death but they are nonetheless restored to life. All Dostoevsky's conclusions are fresh beginnings; a new life commences, either among men or in eternity (Girard 1976, 291).

Girard views all of his examples as realizing a conversion away from mimetic rivalry, but Dostoevsky is especially pertinent to a comparison with *Sula*, since he seems to favour the establishment of contrasting or paralleling fates for his characters. As stated, I would align the conversions undergone by Sula and Nel, respectively, with the conversions so characteristic of Dostoevsky's novels, even though he is more explicit in his Christian symbolism than is Morrison. However, as Girard's readings have convincingly shown, the Christianity of the conversion does not need to be theological or confessional: "Repudiation of a human mediator and deviated transcendence inevitably call for symbols of vertical transcendence whether the author is Christian or not" (Girard 1976, 312). I do not claim to know Morrison's religious views, but I do find her imagery in *Sula* to be "vertical."

would curl into its heavy softness and it would envelop her, carry her, and wash her tired flesh always. (*S*, 148-149)

Like Julien Sorel's anticipation of the guillotine, Sula's contemplation of the boarded-up window from which Eva jumped in a vain effort to save Hannah from burning to death is hardly a comforting one; the window mirrors the futile effort to ward off death, whereas "the tunnels" appear to foretell the sorry fate of those Bottomers who storm the construction site; the lethal yet soothing promise of "water" furthermore links Sula to her victim Chicken Little's tragic accident while also transcending her guilt; finally, the word "always" is the redemption promised by Shadrack come true. The imagery is dire, but it does paradoxically bring relief from the unforgiving laws underlying the world of human mediators of metaphysical desire.

Although Sula's answer to Nel's moral reproach on her deathbed implies invidious comparison between herself and the conventional Bottom womanhood as incarnated by her former best friend,<sup>143</sup> this residue of Romantic pride is just that: a residue that is washed away by the forgiveness uttered after Nel has left her ("Wait'll I tell Nel.").

It seems that whereas Nel's conversion emphasizes affinity with the Other ("We was girls together."), Sula's conversion converges – at least in its preliminary stage, before her summoning up Nel's friendship in the end – on solitude ("It was as though for the first time she was completely alone—where she had always wanted to be—free of the possibility of distraction."). This solitude, however, signals a break from her former pride and pursuit of autonomy which has been motivated by her resentful and self-congratulatory transgression of Bottom conventions. Whereas Sula's former self-reliance was dictated by a pronounced disdain for others, this newly found, transfigured autonomy is on the contrary brought about by her *retreat from* a kind of perverse gregariousness (solitude as a kind of performance for the benefit of others, as well as herself). Sula parading her transgression in front of the Bottomers is only slightly different from Julien Sorel advancing the salon hierarchy against which he is also revolting in secret; Sula retreating to a womb-like state on her deathbed and rediscovering her friendship with Nel is like Julien Sorel resting in the arms of Mme de Rênal, serenely awaiting the guillotine (cf. Girard 1976, 292).

<sup>143</sup> Sula compares her own death to a redwood falling down, as opposed to all the other women at The Bottom who are "dying like a stump" (*S*, 143) – a metaphor that echoes Nel's inward-turned bitterness which the narrator compares to "maple struck down, split and sanded at the height of its green" (*S*, 139). Sula furthermore takes pride in her personal rebellion against racism and male chauvinism when she identifies the slow death of her peers with the fate of "every colored woman in this country" (*ibid.*). One need not disregard the novel's socio-historical context of gender and race to appreciate the mimeticism of Sula and Nel's interpersonal relationship.

If we take our cue from Girard's analyses of Stendhal and Dostoevsky, respectively, it makes no essential difference whether a character's conversion experience stresses a retreat from the society immersed in metaphysical idolatry or a return to a society transfigured by a rediscovered fellowship between men (or women):

Raskolnikov rejects solitude and embraces Others, Julien Sorel rejects Others and embraces solitude.

The opposition seems insurmountable. Yet it is not. [...]. Metaphysical desire brings into being a certain relationship to others and to oneself. True conversion engenders a new relationship to others and to oneself. The mechanical oppositions of solitude and gregariousness, involvement and noninvolvement are the result of romantic interpretations. (Girard 1976, 295)

The synthesis between retreating and re-joining described by Girard is realized in the conversion scenes of *Sula*. Sula's deathbed conversion has her first enjoy genuinely liberating solitude and then reclaim her solidarity with Nel; Nel is brought down from the ivory tower of her moral high ground by her confrontation with Eva, but her conversion comes into full being only after she has escaped from the nursing home to the cemetery where she is allowed to commune with Sula's grave and come face to face with the tragedy of her friend's absence, as well as the belated discovery of her and Sula's basic similarity.

If *Sula* is the one novel where conversion as evidenced in repudiating conflictual mimesis is most fully realized on the story world level as well as on the level of the implied author, then *Amsterdam* is the least 'conversional' of the novels – at least with regard to the story and narratorial levels. In McEwan's plotting the worst comes to worst, mimetically speaking: the two enemy 'brothers' do not find a reflection of positive sameness in each other (as do Morrison's enemy 'sisters'), but are destroyed by the fearful – and somewhat tragi-comic – symmetry between them. This said, however, it is quite obvious that their Sophoclean double destiny is not condoned but is rather lamented – if also ridiculed – on the level of the implied author. This implied author is very adept at detecting an apocalyptic ethos underlying the millennial epoch of the secular West. This apocalyptic insight makes the outspokenly atheist McEwan a very 'Judeo-Christian' writer, if indeed we choose to define this Judeo-Christian writing as does William A. Johnsen in his development of Girard's mimetic theory,<sup>144</sup> "as the moment when secular and sacred literature are seen to rejoin in a common tradition" (Johnsen 2003, 32). This moment of "millennial modernism" is the moment "when we are empowered to recognize persecution" (ibid.). Not only does McEwan's implied author recognize

<sup>144</sup> In addition to Girard, Johnsen also hails Northrop Frye's thought as characteristic of anti-sacrificial modernism.

persecution, he also recognizes how this recognition is used as a neo-sacrificial mechanism of scapegoating scapegoaters in the name of political correctness. The text of *Amsterdam* is therefore alerted to what Johnsen conceives as the “hijacked” knowledge of the surrogate victim mechanism by those in the know (Johnsen 2003, 32-33).<sup>145</sup> If the would-be scapegoat figure, Julian Garmony, had committed a crime with a victim, such as rape or pedophilia, his scapegoating process initiated by Vernon’s paper would very likely have been successful. However, with the victimless ‘crime’ of cross-dressing, the society at large is quick to join Rose Garmony in unmasking Vernon himself as a scapegoater – and scapegoat him instead of Garmony.

*Amsterdam* is the one novel out of the five considered here to have its ethics completely cut in two levels: those of the story world and the implied author. The third-person narrator of McEwan’s novel remains reticent on the surface level of the discourse, but allows the textual irony of the implied author to seep into the narrative through the very cracks opening up between ‘his’ neutrality and the extremely biased focalizations and speeches of the characters.

The third-person narrator of *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* is, like the one in *Sula*, less aloof in her commentary of the characters, and there appears to be a certain affinity between Spark’s narrator and her implied author that *Amsterdam* expressly lacks. Spark’s narrator is more consciously omniscient than McEwan’s, offering a kind of cinematic voice-over for the story and addressing the narratee behind the characters’ backs, as it were (cf. Dorrit Cohn on this kind of “psycho-narration”; e.g., Cohn 1983, 25). One example of this almost gossipy style is the narrator’s speculation of Miss Brodie’s missed chance at spiritual happiness because of her anti-Catholic prejudices. It is also worthy of note, that while not entirely neutral, the narrator does offer an important middle ground between the values of the implied author and the main focalizing character, Sandy, whose views of her mediator, Miss Brodie, are more mimetically loaded. One of the narrator’s functions is, however, to go over Sandy’s head with more objective interventions such as this commentary on the eponym’s hidden psyche:

She always went to church on Sunday mornings, she had a rota of different denominations and sects which included the Free Churches of Scotland, the Established Church of Scotland, the Methodist and the Episcopalian churches and any other church outside the Roman Catholic pale which she might discover. Her disapproval of the Church of Rome was based on her assertions that it was a church

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<sup>145</sup> An example of this kind of “hijacking” in Johnsen’s analysis is Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) in which the party leaders consciously exploit sacrificial practices through such scapegoating rituals as the “Two-Minute Hate” in order to pacify their less enlightened underlings.

of superstition, and that only people who did not want to think for themselves were Roman Catholics. In some ways, her attitude was a strange one, because she was by temperament suited only to the Roman Catholic Church; possibly it could have embraced, even while it disciplined, her soaring and diving spirit, it might even have normalized her. But perhaps this was the reason that she shunned it, a lover of Italy though she was, bringing to her support a rigid Edinburgh-born side of herself when the Catholic Church was in question, although this side was not otherwise greatly in evidence. (*PMJB*, 85)

The narrator is carrying on in this speculative and even blabbing vein, leaving it to the implied reader to separate the wheat from the chaff, the wheat being the concise meaning behind the narrator's discourse that the implied author wishes to be grasped by the implied reader: Miss Brodie's temperamental and non-analytical attitude towards things that are essentially abstract like Christian dogmatics, her illogical side-taking, her perhaps justified rebellion against stifling social conventions (e.g., being "normalized"), etc. The narrator is not unreliable, to be sure, but neither is 'she' speaking directly in unison with the implied author who remains deliberately inscrutable. I would therefore hesitate to side with those critics who feel that Spark employs a God-like narrator; if there is an analogy to God in her text, it is not the narrator *per se*, but the implied author who has let the narrator loose, with a certain amount of leash.

According to Bruffee, the elegiac narrator typically sets out not to bury his hero but to exhume him (Bruffee 1983, 199).<sup>146</sup> This sepulchral metaphor would ring true to Girard who we by now know to be fascinated by the connections between cultural origins and entombing. And although Girard's idea of a *novelistic* conversion is not so much related to this demythologization of cultural origins as it is to the ensuing apocalyptic escalation of conflict,<sup>147</sup> he does draw a parallel between renouncing rivalry and being raised from the grave. Such resurrection motifs gain special momentum in Shakespeare (Hermione's statue revealed as herself in the flesh in *The Winter's Tale*; cf. Girard 2004, 335-336) and Dostoevsky (Stepan Trofimovich confessing to his life's lies on his deathbed in *The*

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<sup>146</sup> Bruffee's specific examples are Salinger's "Seymour: An Introduction" (1959) and Saint-Exupéry's *The Little Prince* (*Le Petit Prince*, 1943), so he is not necessarily speaking of a universal exhumation motif of the elegiac genre. However, even in the narrowest of descriptions, it is a powerful metaphor for the renunciation of mimetic rivalry.

<sup>147</sup> Before mimetic rivalry can be transcended, it must first be acknowledged, and this is by definition a post-archaic process, made possible in history by the non-sacrificial dimension of Judaism and Christianity. Cf. Introduction.

*Possessed*, and Alyosha's prophetic speech on Ilusha's grave in *The Brothers Karamazov*; cf. Girard 1976, 290; 313-314)<sup>148</sup>

In the novels studied here, there are also significant occasions on which gravesites and tombs play an important role, with the possibility of a symbolic resurrection implied. The meaning of Sula's grave to Nel's conversion in Morrison's *Sula* has already been analyzed at length in chapter 2.1., as has, in chapter 5.3., the mimetic significance of George Lane's planned burial of Molly as opposed to the mere cremation ceremony that opens the novel in McEwan's *Amsterdam*. Also, the sacrificial and post-sacrificial connotations of Bunny's snow-covered body and its subsequent belated burial in Tarrt's *The Secret History* have been covered from the communal and societal point of view in chapter 4.3. What remains to be said in this context of unmasking past transgressions is the nightmarish and prophetic manner in which the burial motif is treated in this novel.

In *The Secret History*, Richard has two dreams the topography of which converges on tombs. The first of these is concerned with the repression of Bunny's murder, a repression that does not quite work but does not entail a proper unmasking either. The second dream, however, is a more successful case of demystification of mimetic violence, and it also settles – albeit only provisionally – once and for all the issues rising from the mimetic hung-up Richard suffers in relation to the deceased Henry.

The first dream – which Richard claims to unfold “[i]n some strange country between dream and waking” (*SH*, 477) – is set “in a cemetery, not the one Bunny was buried in but a different one, much older, and very famous – thick with hedges and evergreens, its cracked marble pavilions choked with vines” (*ibid.*). Although Richard protests – once again, too much – that he is nowhere near Bunny's gravesite, the dreamscape speaks its own language of repression: the vines are *choking* the tombs, the cemetery itself is covered with a jungle-like camouflage, rendering the place with its “cracked marble” a virtual temptation for archeologists to conduct their excavations; even more importantly, the names on the gravestones appear indecipherable to Richard (*SH*, 478), just as in Morrison's novel, Sula's first name is omitted from the Peace family grave. Furthermore, Richard ends up perched on a “top of a hill in a dark grove of pines” (*ibid.*) – pines as fir trees perhaps symbolizing the presence of Dionysus. What Richard is searching for in the dream is a particular tomb that he knows belongs to some “famous writer – Marcel Proust, I think, or maybe George Sand” (*ibid.*). The search for the writer's tomb very probably signifies a transference object for the

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<sup>148</sup> The analogy between the raised Lazarus and the repenting Raskolnikov in *Crime and Punishment* is arguably the most famous occurrence of the resurrection motif in Dostoevsky.



tomb of Bunny. Also, it could be a metaphor for what good writers do: dig up bodies unmasked by sacrificial mythology or the ‘Romantic lie.’<sup>149</sup>

The actual victim, Bunny, makes no forthright appearance in the dream, although in the end Richard feels he is being accosted by either his ghost or his resurrected corpse:

[...] I heard, very near, the wry, ostentatious clearing of a throat.

What happened next took place in a flash. Looking over my shoulder I had only the most fleeting impression of the figure looming behind me, but the glimpse I got struck me stumbling backwards, screaming, falling down and down and down until at last I hit my own bed, which rushed up from the dark to meet me. The jolt knocked me awake. Trembling, I lay flat on my back for a moment, then scrambled for the light.

Desk, floor, chair. I lay back, still trembling. Though his features had been clotted and ruined, with a thick, scabbed quality that I did not like to remember even with the light on – still, I had known very well who it was, and in the dream he knew I knew. (*SH*, 478-479)

The figure violently confronting Richard in the dream is obviously Bunny (who is known for the mannerism of clearing his throat; cf. *SH*, 155; 168), whose monstrously dishevelled appearance is reminiscent of his fatal fall in real life; in the dream, it is Bunny’s turn to fell Richard. Waking up, Richard still reels from the shock of the vengeful encounter (“stumbling,” “screaming,” “falling,” “jolt,” “knocked,” “trembling,” “scrambled for”), and has to double-check the mundane safety of his actual environment (“Desk, floor, chair”) with the sepulchral dreamscape still haunting him with its archaic and sacrificial trappings.

However, before Bunny makes his disguised appearance in the dream’s dramatic finale, Richard meets with another figure that incarnates his guilt more viscerally than Bunny. The figure is Champ, Bunny’s infant nephew. Though in good health when Richard first takes notice of him at Bunny’s funeral, the Champ of the dream is in more dire straits than his upbeat name would suggest, “tumbled the length of its body, “wearing nothing but a plastic diaper” and with “long ugly scratches on its arms and legs” (*SH*, 478).

Like “the tomb of a famous writer,” the maltreated figure of baby Champ plays a transference role in relation to Bunny, but the stand-in is also provisionally unmasked for what it is: the victim of Richard’s crime. However, in the dream Richard still does his best to repress his own guilt, projecting it instead on Bunny’s family: “The Corcorans were thoughtless but this was unconscionable; *those monsters*, I thought, *those imbeciles*, *they just*

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<sup>149</sup> Interestingly enough, Proust is mentioned here, as well as later when Richard reminisces reading him while recovering from his gun wound and, by implication, from a spiritual wound afflicted on his psyche by Henry’s suicide (*SH*, 612).

*went off and left it all by itself*" (ibid.; italics in the original). Of course, Richard's outrage is a form of overcompensation: it is he himself and his accomplices, not the Corcorans, who have left one of their own lying on the ground "all by itself," as a slain corpse.

The second dream in a way corrects the mistakes of the first dream and unmasks the mythological remnants of it. In this dream, which also marks the end of his narrative, Richard finds himself wondering aimlessly in a dystopian fantasy land ("[...] a strange deserted city [...] underpopulated by war or disease."; *SH*, 627) He then walks into a building resembling "a laboratory, maybe, or a museum" (*SH*, 628) where he joins a group of pipe-smoking men who are gazing at a kind of time machine exhibited in a glass case. As the machine slowly revolves on its turntable exhibiting pictures of famous monuments of the past ("An Inca temple...click click click...the Pyramids...the Parthenon. History passing beneath my very eyes, changing every moment."; ibid.), Richard is joined by Henry who engages him in seemingly casual conversation about their surroundings the information of which he insists is "classified" (ibid.). When Richard asks his friend whether he is happy in his netherworld existence, Henry responds after some hesitation, "'Not particularly'" and then retorts, "'But you're not very happy where you are, either'" (*SH*, 629). He excuses himself for being "'late for an appointment'" (ibid.), leaving Richard to watch "his back receding down the long, gleaming hall" (ibid.). With these words the novel ends.

A closer look at the dynamics of this final dream will reveal its preoccupation with mimetic desire. Firstly, the apocalyptic dimension of the setting connotes reciprocal violence run amok ("[...] the streets were dark, bombed-out, abandoned."; *SH*, 627; "ruined parks, blasted statuary, vacant lots overgrown with weeds and collapsed apartment houses with rusted girders poking out like ribs"; *SH*, 628). However, contrasting with these scenes of destruction and decay, there are more "futuristic" (ibid.) sites ("Long, cool perspectives of modern architecture, rising phosphorescent and eerie from the rubble."; ibid.) that testify to a new order founded on the ruins of the old. The time machine display of the tomb-like monuments of ancient civilizations links these archaic constructs to the "new buildings" (ibid.) co-existing with the decimated "old city, like London" (*SH*, 627) of the dream's contemporary environment. The architecture of the dream speaks the tell-tale language of the sacrificial origins of cultures, including the modern one, but also of the cycles of mimetic escalation of rivalry that give birth to the foundational need for sacrifices.<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> In her reading of Girard's *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel* as applied to Tarrt's novel, Marya de Haas interprets the display of ancient and medieval monuments in Richard's concluding dream as a contemplation of the passing of an age when transcendence was taken seriously (de Haas 1994, 33). However, she does not differentiate

Secondly, mirroring the collective mimesis, there is the rivalrous interaction between Richard and Henry. Although appearing amicable enough, Henry resorts to his familiarly aloof attitude towards his squire-like friend, re-establishing the old gnostic hierarchy between the two that is so strongly in evidence in the confession sequence during which Henry maintains his superior knowledge of Dionysiac ecstasy; in the dream he similarly reminds Richard that the information he holds is “classified” (*SH*, 628) and not to be disseminated to the plebeian likes of Richard. The “appointment” Henry is rushing to is a repetition of his claim to have met the real Dionysus, since appointments in the hereafter depicted in the dream could very possibly be audiences with divine creatures, perhaps even ‘God.’ In any case, the stressing of *meeting* someone is symptomatic of Henry’s and Richard’s mimetic preoccupations.

The “classified” existence enjoyed – or, rather, suffered – by Henry is of course synonymous with death itself. But in a way, Henry is dead even before his suicide; he himself admits as much (“[...] my life, for the most part, has been stale and colorless. Dead, I mean.”; *SH*, 556). That Henry experiences a turn to vitality after the bacchanal (“‘But then it changed. [...] The night I killed that man.’”; *ibid.*), the subsequent turmoil and humiliation only serve to highlight and intensify the mimetic resentment and pride that went on before, casting a retrospective shadow on Henry’s – and by implication, Richard’s – whole life. Theirs is the kind of death-in-life that Girard views as symptomatic of the fatality of mimetic rivalry. Already before his death, Henry’s ‘first language,’ Greek, represents a tantalizing “secret” to Richard as opposed to “common” English (*SH*, 224). The ‘dead’ language thus anticipates the ultimate secret, namely death to which Henry in the end becomes privy.

But is Richard doomed to live a life as mimetically destructive as Henry has? Is Henry’s retort about Richard sharing his misery suggestive of Richard’s continuing mimeticism? Or is it rather Richard’s (dreamt-of) warning to himself that has the possibility of preventing him from making the same deadly mistakes as Henry? Henry’s retreat at the end of the dream – as well as of the novel itself – could also be interpreted as a recommendation of the latter solution, since now at last Henry’s ghost which has made its appearance to Richard during his waking hours is laid to rest.

*The Secret History* is in the end much more Judeo-Christian than Greco-Roman. The Christian and Dostoevskyan tendency of Tarrt’s novel is hinted at in the conclusion where

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between archaic and Judeo-Christian transcendence. Of course, Girard himself failed to do the same in this, his first, work on mimetic theory. In his later books it becomes clear that the equivalent of vertical transcendence cannot be found in archaic religion or in the archaic remnants of Christianity or Judaism.

Richard, after Henry has died, accompanies his and Henry's former love interest Camilla and Francis, who is recovering from his suicide attempt, to a Catholic church in Boston where an Ash Wednesday Mass is underway. The mass sequence is not conclusive, but it presents the three characters (with Charles meaningfully absent, though alive) at least with the possibility of embracing 'vertical' transcendence. At the same time, the failure to fully do so is demonstrated by the fact that, while worshipping in the church, the three take ashes on their foreheads but tellingly refuse communion (*SH*, 620).

In *The Secret History*, a novel that employs a first-person narrator with a crime to confess, there exists a more decided discrepancy between the implied author and the narrator than in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, a discrepancy that is analogous to the one yawning between the narrating-I and the experiencing-I whose actions in the story world are under the scrutiny of both, albeit in different degrees. The narrative dynamic of *The Secret History* is similar to a more famous precedent of a confessional novel with a morally ambiguous I-narrator, namely Nabokov's *Lolita* (1955) as analyzed by Phelan<sup>151</sup>:

[...] Nabokov, through Humbert's narration, gives voice to pedophilic fantasies, guides his audience to participate in those fantasies and feel something of their appeal, even as he *simultaneously* signals the audience to reject both the fantasies and Humbert. (Phelan 2005, 106-107; italics in the original)

In Tarrt's novel, "Humbert's pedophilic fantasies" are replaced by Richard's complicity to murder, but *The Secret History* is, like *Lolita*, concerned with the double movement of giving voice to a criminal's motives *and* disapproving of those motives while understanding them.

Blake famously remarked of *Paradise Lost*, that Milton was of the Devil's party without knowing it. Blake's immoralist provocation has since been refuted by, among others, Dorothy L. Sayers. Rather than declaring the Devil and his followers bankrupt at the start of the narrative, Sayers suggests it is much more in the writer's interests to make the Satanic figure of his or her story as sympathetic as possible, so as to compel the reader to identify with the psychology of the Fall and realize his or her own culpability. This realization is not tantamount to the approval of Satan's works, but in fact it achieves the opposite effect in the end (Sayers 1963, 234-235).

Taking Sayers's thesis to its logical conclusion, the reader's disillusionment with the seductively evil character anticipates his or her conversion away from that character's moral

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<sup>151</sup> Phelan makes use of *The Annotated Lolita* (1991, edited by Alfred Appel Jr., New York: Vintage Books).

depravity, but not without recognizing the similar tendencies lurking within the reader's own self, thus pre-empting the reader's scapegoating of the "diabolical" character(s).

Returning to *The Secret History*, it could be said that the implied author of Tartt as a kind of Milton or Nabokov – or rather *their* implied authors – is demonstrating to the implied reader how tempting it is to identify with a Satanic character. This demonstration is realized through the analogy posited between Richard as an admirer of Henry on the one hand and Richard-as-narratee as a potential admirer of Richard-as-narrator. The implied reader is thus warned against letting the narrator off the hook, even if the narratee did succumb to his admiration of the narrator – which he does not, at least not completely.

Like the third-person narrators in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* and *Sula*, but unlike the one in *Amsterdam*, the I-narrator Richard is allowed to liberally comment on the story he tells. Also, as was shown in chapter six concerning narrative memory, he is furthermore commenting on his narration, expressing at times his frustration in trying to convey meaning to the narratee and evading responsibility for his story world actions.<sup>152</sup>

Of the five novels studied, the second to employ first-person narration, Hustvedt's *What I Loved*, proposes the biggest challenge in the analysis of how mimetic desire is processed on the levels of story world, narration and the implied author. Whereas Sandy's adoration / demonization of Miss Brodie is highly ironized by both Spark's narrator and her implied author, in Hustvedt's *What I Loved*, the implied author seems to share or at least condone the I-narrator Leo Hertzberg's likes and dislikes. The Manichean delineations between characters the implied reader loves to love (Bill, Violet, Matthew, Leo) and loves to hate (Giles, Lucille, Mark, Hasseborg) stand out as the most obvious residues of the 'Romantic lie' in Hustvedt's otherwise very 'novelistic' text. Even though it could also be argued that the apparent dualisms merely serve to unmask the pathologies of these hyper-mimetic characters, one cannot help but feel that Hustvedt's implied author unfairly discriminates between exposing 'her' villainous characters' desire while conspiring to hide the desire of 'her' heroes. For example, Violet, though not completely lacking in sympathy towards her rival Lucille, is

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<sup>152</sup> For a narrator's ability to comment on both the story told and the narratorial process of telling it, see Rimmon-Kenan (2002, 99-101). A narrator's commentary on the story may take forms such as interpretation, judgements and generalization (Rimmon-Kenan 2002, 99-100). In the five examples studied here, an example of interpretation (perhaps bordering on judgement) would be the excerpt from *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* quoted above in which the narrator speculates on the potential of the Catholic Church to both inspire and pacify Miss Brodie. A similar example from *Sula*, would be the narrator's observation concerning the sacrificial dynamics of the Bottom, differentiating the more symbolic and less physical scapegoating tendency of the community from an outright lynching: "They knew anger well but not despair, and they didn't stone sinners for the same reason they didn't commit suicide—it was beneath them" (S, 90). The commentary here is more in the line of judgement than mere interpretation.

nevertheless given the last word concerning her. Although Violet's rant is brought on by Lucille's telephone call about Mark's relapse into his old criminal ways, it is obvious that her anger is also directed towards the other woman's being:

Violet kept her temper. She told Lucille there was nothing either of them could do, but when she hung up the phone, her face was flushed and her hand was trembling.

"I think Lucille means well," I said to Violet.

Violet looked at me for several seconds, then she started yelling. "Don't you know that she's only half alive! Part of her is dead!" Her pale face and the broken cry in her voice shocked me, and I couldn't find an answer. She grabbed my upper arms and began to shake me, snarling through her teeth. "Don't you know that she was slowly killing Bill? I saw it right away. And Mark, my boy. He was my boy, too. I loved them. I loved them. She didn't. She can't." Her eyes opened as if she were suddenly afraid. "Remember? I asked you to take care of Bill." She shook me harder as her eyes filled with tears. "I thought you understood! I thought you knew!" (*WIL*, 349-350)

Violet's outburst manifests what from the point of view of mimetic theory is the major problem in Hustvedt's novel, namely its mixture of mimetic desire unmasked and mimetic desire maintained. On the one hand, the novel presents the possibility of transcending the mimetic vortex of feverish prestige-seeking by juxtaposing the purely metaphysical desire (as evidenced in Giles's nihilistic conception of art, Hasseborg's resentment masked as criticism, Lucille's rivalrous idea of marriage and her ascetic idea of childrearing, Mark's amoral and parasitic interaction with his environment) with 'objective' desire (Bill's narratively insightful and psychologically probing art, Leo's appreciative and encouraging criticism, Violet's unconditional demonstration of conjugal love and parental nurture, Matthew's morally and existentially responsible interaction with others). In this light, Violet's castigation of Lucille and Leo's demonization of Hasseborg could be seen as recognitions of objective faults, especially with certain empathetic modifications in mind (Violet's claim that Lucille's lack of love is not her own fault because she "can't" love, as well as Leo's "pity" of Hasseborg; *WIL*, 76).

On the other hand, allowing the 'good' characters to point out the faults of the 'bad' characters speaks a more disturbingly mimetic and Manichean language, and from the point of view of Girard's theory, renders Hustvedt's implied author as a (negatively) mimetic agent on 'her' own. Even though the 'novelistic truth' could still be salvaged from this surplus of the 'Romantic lie,' it is clear that Violet at least never fully realizes the mimetic roots of her rivalry with Lucille. What's more, regarding Violet's character, neither does Hustvedt's implied author. Attributing Violet with the moral high ground of the narrative universe, no

matter how ‘objective’ her personal merits are, is a far cry from Morrison’s *Sula*, which does not let Sula off the mimetic hook even after unmasking Nel’s self-perceived innocence as a fallacy.

There is, nevertheless, a novelistic strength in *What I Loved*, and that lies in its open articulation of envy. This very explicitness of the acknowledgement of mimetic rivalry is what is lacking in both the narratorial levels of *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* and *The Secret History*. There is also a concrete denunciation of conflictual desire on Leo’s part, and it is not motivated by a desire to keep the peace between himself and Violet, but is rather a genuine letting-go. This repudiation of the triangle in which Violet is the elusive object is realized in Leo’s giving up his erotic dreams that were first inspired by her account of a previous triangle (taking place during her youthful sojourn in Paris) in which she was the object shared by her then-lover, Jules, and an older man, Monsieur Renasse, who taught her the piano. This (literally) French triangle itself becomes a sexual obsession for Leo, probably because it reflects his own need to have Violet’s desirability confirmed by a second man, Bill. By letting go of Bill’s perceived metaphysical superiority and accepting Violet’s sexual rejection of him, Leo can redeem his mimetic relationship to both of them in his mind, once the now mature Violet embarks on yet another of her stays in Paris:

Violet packed up Bill’s work clothes and took them along to Paris. I imagine that she still puts them on from time to time, for comfort. When I think of Violet in Bill’s ragged shirt and paint-smear’d jeans, I give her a Camel to smoke, and I call the image in my mind *Self-Portrait*. I never imagine her at the piano anymore. The lesson finally ended with a real kiss that sent her far away from me. (*WIL*, 366)

That Leo is able to think of Violet as somebody who is both a subject in her own right (“*Self-Portrait*”) and the love of another, signals his repudiation of conflictual desire; Leo no longer demonizes his mediator, Bill, nor fetishizes his object, Violet.

In *What I Loved*, Leo has acted as the atelier critic to Bill’s oeuvre. This role puts him in a subservient ‘squire’ position in relation to his ‘hero,’ a kind of Max Brod to Bill’s Kafka – or an Ed McMahon to Bill’s Johnny Carson. But in the end Leo is more like John the Baptist: a friend of the bridegroom who is at last ready to let *his* friend have the bride. Of course, the metaphysical hierarchy is different from the Johannine context where John the Baptist – and through him, John the Evangelist – recognizes Jesus as not his equal, but his superior, an incarnation of truly superhuman transcendence. However, when read in the light of Girard’s reinterpretation of the *imitatio Christi* principle, the supernatural sphere itself is not essential. What is crucial to the mimetic understanding of vertical transcendence is recognizing the

nature of the imitator's desire and renouncing the part of it that is resentful, envious and rivalrous. In Leo's case, it is giving birth to a narrative that is in the end as much a study of his own desire as that of his significant Other.

To sum up the issue of mimetic conversion as demonstrated in the readings of these five novels, it could be stated that narrative form as such does not determine the thematic or structural outcomes of character interactions. *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* and *The Secret History* share a similar ambiguity of an ending despite the fact that Spark's novel employs an intrusive third-person narrator, whereas Tarrt's text relies on the limited knowledge of the first-person perspective. Also, despite their different treatment of their protagonists, Hustvedt's *What I Loved* and Morrison's *Sula* tell a structurally similar story of a dead friend's memory haunting the living friend. In McEwan's *Amsterdam*, it is of course vital to the fatal symmetry between the two main characters that neither should remain alive to tell their story. However, there would be no thematic obstacle for a third character doing the narrating, although, considering the overall rottenness of the community described by McEwan's text, this first-person narrator would have to be an unreliable one, perhaps more in the vein of a Richard Papen than a Leo Hertzberg. This said, there remains one *practical* barrier to adopting this kind of narrative mode, namely omniscience; a third character would realistically be denied an inside view of Clive's and Vernon's unspoken thoughts and emotions.

The choice of narrative form is not, of course, superfluous, but different emphases in perspective work to highlight different aspects of mimetic desire. However, one of the points made in this study is to demonstrate that Girard's idea of a 'novelistic conclusion' is far from dated, albeit the actual conversion narrative as a genre has undoubtedly waned in popularity. Nevertheless, even in those four novels (*Sula* being the exception) where mimetic rivalry is not resolved in a benign fashion on the level of the story world, it is nevertheless recognized as an important problem. Therefore to claim that these novels – which are more contemporary than the ones analyzed by Girard himself – only reflect mimetic desire but do not recognize it would be a rash judgment indeed. Even in contemporary fiction there exists a plea, no matter how implicitly recommended, that is very similar to that articulated by Girard in the ending of *The Scapegoat*: "The time has come for us to forgive one another. If we wait any longer there will not be time enough" (Girard 1989, 212).



## 8 Conclusion

“Novelistic conclusions are bound to be banal since they all quite literally repeat the same thing,” Girard writes in the conclusion of his first book, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel* (Girard 1976, 308). Since the publication of that debut, Girard has proceeded to repeat the same thing in his subsequent work, namely the recognition of the existence of mimetic desire and the possibility of transcending its negative ramifications. What Girard has *not* done is to elaborate all the textual and narrative levels on which this transcendence is allowed to take place in the realm of ‘novelistic’ literature. This dissertation has tried, among other things, to do exactly that. If this effort has remained provisional in some cases, then I take all the more pleasure in laying bare some investigative routes that might be travelled by other scholars who also recognize the fecundity of combining Girard’s mimetic theory with the study of narrative poetics.

The conclusions this dissertation has drawn from the conclusions of the five novels studied in it are the following:

On the level of the *story*, only one of the texts, namely Morrison’s *Sula*, achieves the mimetic conversion of the main character (or, in this case, the two main characters).

On the level of *narration*, Hustvedt’s *What I Loved* achieves a similar kind of conversion to that of *Sula*, although the I-narrator’s stakes are not as high as those of Morrison’s characters, since the mimetic conflict between him and his model is less intense to begin with. Also, on the narratorial level, the confession-like progression of Tartt’s *The Secret History* comes very close to Girard’s ideal ‘novelistic’ conclusion, but falls short (although, with mimetic stakes being higher in Tartt than in Hustvedt, the I-narrator Richard Papen should perhaps be given some extra ‘Brownie points’ in a contest with the I-narrator Leo Hertzberg). Spark’s *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, which also employs a confessional motif in its third-person narration, appears at first to be conclusionally quite comparable to Tartt’s novel, as it leaves the main character’s transformation deliberately provisional and ambiguous; in *The Secret History*, the now deceased model is fantasized as physically “receding” away from the imitating subject, whereas in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, the imitator verbally articulates the fact of her dead model’s decisive influence to a story world interlocutor as reported by the narrator. These story events could be taken to signal a spiritual divorce between the idol and the idolator resulting in an opening towards a ‘vertically’ transcendent, post-conflictual and post-sacrificial, dimension of mimetic desire. However, because of narratorial lack of commitment, both conclusions could signal just the opposite, namely a hangover of deviated

transcendence. In Tarrt's novel, Henry's "receding" takes him to the "classified" realm of the dead, which could mean that Henry retains his superior "Secret History" for himself, leaving Richard in a continuing state of conflictual desire. Similarly, in Spark, Sandy's articulation of Miss Brodie's influence could signal a mimetic setback in that she now openly bows down to her model, resolutely refusing to transcend the double bind. However, precisely because the Romantic lie thrives on the subject keeping it a secret, the very pronouncement of mimetic conflict is tantamount to spiritual progress. I would therefore suggest that *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* comes closer than *The Secret History* in renouncing conflictual mimetic desire, both on the levels of story and narration.

Finally, on the level of *the implied author*, it is only in Morrison's novel where the perspective hierarchy of the narrative conforms as a whole to the conversional mode. In the other four novels, one could nevertheless make a case for a 'highly recommended' conversion, or a turning away from destructive mimesis and opening up towards a transconflictual and transsacrificial dimension. The most convincing texts among the four in this respect are the most ambiguous ones, namely Tarrt's and especially Spark's. The least 'conversional' is, of course, McEwan's *Amsterdam*. This text has, as noted, an extremely neutral narrator, one that refuses to cast any direct moral, political or philosophical aspersions on the main characters. However, this reticence is exactly what convinces the reader of the moral failings of Clive and Vernon; the narrator does not have to judge the two rival characters, they – or rather their very rivalries – do it for 'him.' By symmetrically demonstrating the augmentation of mutual resentment from the focalizing perspectives of both characters, the narrator refers the ethical discernment to the implied authorial level which then directs it to the implied reader. Now, two wrongs do not make a right, but the ridiculous similarity between the two main characters pathetically insisting on fundamental differences that supposedly separate them unmasks the mechanism giving birth to such 'fearful symmetry.' And so fearful is the symmetry that the implied reader must confront its apocalyptic ramifications, regardless of whether he or she feels compassion, shock, or mere *Schadenfreude* towards the unfortunate pair.

By invoking the basic narratological tools such as the implied author and narrative perspective structure in relation to mimetic theory, I have tried to make a case for an important *narrative* dimension inherent in Girard's thought. Despite – or because of – the fact that Girard staunchly opposes the poststructuralist fusion of fact and fiction into an incoherent Text with a capital T, his theory is extremely well suited for systematic narrative studies (not only literary studies, but also, for example, theater and film studies). And although it is not

always necessary to take into account the whole three-phased arch of mimetic theory, I would suggest to consider it more often and with less prejudice than it has been so far, at least in literary studies and narratology.

Perhaps more importantly, however, the aim of this study has been to point out how frequently repeated and essentially important an aspect the imitation of desire actually is in the contemporary (in this case, Anglophone) prose fiction. What Girard calls mimetic desire is easily foreshadowed by other forms of narrative desire, such as romantic love (or erotic lust) and monetary greed. And yet these stock motives of narrative fiction are themselves often motivated by imitation, both acquisitive and conflictual; a character wants a love interest or a large dose of financial success because he or she sees another character have or pursue those things.

Not all mimetic conflicts in narrative are necessarily resolved in the course of that narrative, though. I have made a case for the kind of novel that, regardless of outcomes in the story world or narration, recommends the repudiation of sacrificial and / or conflictual mimesis on an implied authorial level through a shuffling of character and narratorial perspectives. However, the degree of novelistic conversion achieved in whatever textual level, is not itself a genre qualification. An adventure novel (or, indeed, a film, television series, comic book, etc.) with, say, a science-fiction or western – or Wall Street – backdrop, is certainly driven by conflictual and sacrificial action between characters, but it may or may not achieve a spiritual or ethical repudiation of negative mimetic desire. Similarly, an erotic melodrama more often than not employs a ‘triangular’ structure of character relationships, but the triangle itself may or may not be unmasked as the very motivation of desire.

Of course, the mimetic structure as described by Girard is not a case of take it or leave it. One can find its various aspects, or phases, more useful than others, depending on the research question at hand. One may study either triangular or dyadic relationships, surrogate victimage, or the unmasking of the former. I would suggest, however, to regard the three-phased (or, with the possible delineation of the historical or apocalyptic phase into an independent phase, the four-phased) arch of mimetic theory as an especially useful narrative pattern in determining the various levels of consciousness as to the workings of sacrificial and conflictual mechanisms. As I have hoped to show, these levels of consciousness may be found by paying more attention to the (implied) authorial intentions as well as ‘lower’ instances (i.e., the story world with its character focalizations and plot events, or the narrator’s discourse) of the narrative perspective structure.

Naturally, if the recognition of mimetic rivalry and its sacrificial containment only takes place on the 'highest,' namely authorial, level, the characters or narrators are not saved from the ensuing physical, psychological or spiritual mayhem. Girard's views on the matter of such salvation in culture and society at large are not overly optimistic. However, the very possibility of a mimetic conversion offers hope for those who are at least willing to glance at the truth, whether 'novelistic' or more broadly anthropological and historical:

The Kingdom is already here, but human violence will increasingly mask it. This is the paradox of our world. Apocalyptic thought is thus contrary to the wisdom that believes that peaceful identity and fraternity is accessible on the purely human level. It is also contrary to all the reactionary forms of thought that want to restore differences and see identity as only a form of destructive uniformity or leveling conformity. Apocalyptic thought recognizes the source of conflict in identity, but it also sees in it the hidden presence of the thought of 'the neighbor as yourself' which can certainly not triumph, but is secretly active, secretly dominant under the sound and fury on the surface. (Girard 2010, 46)

One important domain under whose surface neighborly love – or at least a desire towards that love – can be vindicated is the novel, even in the medium's more contemporary developments. Once human violence is recognized for what it is, it becomes infinitely easier to find ways to heal the wounds inflicted on selves and others, in fact and in fiction, in the reality of life and in the truth of narrative.

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